

**MULTICULTURAL MULTIMEDIA LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY:
A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY
OF GREEN GUERRILLAS YOUTH MEDIA TECH COLLECTIVE**

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability is a popular term used to describe many different types of activities and practices, though it has vastly different meanings to people depending on their cultural context. The Green Guerrillas Youth Media Tech Collective, a community organization based in Ithaca, New York, has set out to redefine sustainability by critically examining the relationship of poor people of color - the global majority - to the environments they live in as well as the political, economic, and social systems they interact with, by giving a diverse group of local teenagers the opportunity to engage these subjects through media production and positive youth development activities in a holistic job-training program. Based on a participatory action research study during the first two years of the organization, this study used participant observation, ethnography, and narrative inquiry to demonstrate that a supportive social learning environment engaged in multimedia production is a powerful tool for getting marginalized adolescents engaged in developing environmental and social critical consciousness, as well as fostering a sense of empowerment in their personal lives and their ability to generate social change. This supports them in navigating their own lives more in harmony with the environment and society, building the foundation for community resiliency and a more socially just and environmentally conscious world where biocultural diversity is respected and protected. The stories told by these young people and the adults who work with them contain essential embodied practical knowledge and philosophical insights about the social dynamics of learning that contribute an important critical perspective to the conversations and praxis around broad, interconnected concepts of sustainability and multicultural environmental education.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jason Corwin is a 2002 graduate of Cornell University with a B.S. in communications. He graduated from Hahnemann University School of Health Sciences and Humanities in 1995 with an A.S. in emergency medical services. He enjoys being outdoors and making movies.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Sustainability is a popular buzzword these days used to describe many different types of activities and practices. Common usage denotes a certain orientation to economic and industrial development, and most frequently refers to practices that have a low impact on the environment, such as renewable energy, green building, alternative transportation technologies, and local organic agriculture. Unfortunately, not as much attention seems to be paid to questions of the sustainability of social inequality and its indicators such as racism, poverty, discrimination, marginalization, and criminalization. In the small central New York college town of Ithaca, where Cornell University and Ithaca College are located, environmental awareness and ethics are ostensibly very high, with both schools committed to several sustainability initiatives. However, that awareness and activity tends to be restricted to certain segments of the community. The mainstream local sustainability movement is predominantly White and middle class. Green Guerrillas Youth Media Tech Collective,¹ an Ithaca-based community organization, has set out to redefine sustainability by critically examining the relationship of poor people of color - the global majority - to the environments they live in as well as the political, economic, and social systems they interact with, by giving local youth of color the opportunity to engage these subjects through media production and positive youth development activities in a holistic job-training learning environment.

¹ Not to be confused with the community gardening organization in New York City called Green Guerillas. Although Green Guerrillas Youth Media Tech Collective is also often referred to simply as Green Guerrillas (with 2 r's), they are two different organizations.

At the time I am writing this thesis, I have been living in the Ithaca area for over eight years since first coming to Cornell as an undergraduate transfer student majoring in communications. Living close to the downtown area and making friends in the local community, my wife and I noticed what we felt were a lack of interesting positive activities for adolescents. Though there were the two community centers located downtown that offered youth programming, there were no activities involving media arts production and cutting edge technology use. Having lived in Philadelphia prior to moving to Ithaca, we were familiar with a well-established community media project called the Scribe Video Center.² We thought it would be interesting and exciting to some day start a media arts center in Ithaca.

I had several years of experience as a documentary videographer prior to my acceptance at Cornell and had deferred my admission for a year so that I could finish producing and editing my first feature-length project. Upon graduation in 2002 with a BS, I got a job with Cornell's Department of Theatre, Film and Dance as the Media Assistant for the Film Production Program. Working there for four years was an extremely valuable experience. Though I was primarily responsible for maintaining the program's equipment, from purchasing to repairs to outfitting the students for their shoots; I was also involved in giving the students hands-on instruction in the use of camera, lighting, sound, and editing equipment. By working directly with the professor teaching production classes, I learned a great deal about how the subject is taught. This was extremely useful, as I had actually never had any formal instruction

² "Scribe Video Center was founded in 1982 as a place where emerging and experienced media artists could gain access to the tools and knowledge of video making and work together in a supportive environment. Scribe provides training in all aspects of film, video, and audio production. We also offer classes in computer-based interactive media to individuals and community organizations as well. We give emerging and mid-level video makers the skills and opportunity to use video and film as tools for self-expression and for representing and supporting their communities." For more information see <http://www.scribe.org>.

in the subject. I was completely self-taught, having learned videography and editing from working on independent documentaries and television shows with a cable-access channel, DUTV-Cable 54, based at Drexel University. Even though I was not a student there, due to the lack of a public access station in Philadelphia, the station manager had opened the doors to community members who wanted to produce shows; so I availed myself of the opportunity and learned “on the go” as I worked on projects. After a few years, access to equipment there became more difficult, however the advent of digital video and affordable non-linear editing systems allowed me to acquire my own equipment and start my own small production company. I had done a fair amount of photography growing up and worked with a group of student filmmakers at my high school one year, but had drifted away from it in my early twenties. However, getting into documentary video production rekindled a passion for visual storytelling and I dedicated myself to working a lot of overtime as a paramedic to finance my work. With several television shows and a half hour short documentary under my belt, in 1999 I completed my first documentary feature, *The Flickering Flame: Life and Legacy of Chief Turkey Tayac*. During my first semester at Cornell I had the privilege of showing the movie at a film festival for the first time. Ironically, it was my semi-professional experience as an independent video documentary maker with an aptitude for troubleshooting and fixing complex equipment and editing platforms, more than my recent communications degree, that I felt got me the job after graduation, though a BS was a minimum requirement.

The issue of sustainability and its broad implications has long been an interest of mine. Since high school I have supported and organized on behalf of Indigenous peoples struggling to protect their territories’ environments against resource extraction and unsustainable development. As an Onöndowága' (more commonly known as

Seneca) person, I have been deeply interested in and influenced by Indigenous knowledge and culture. I brought my background, interests and skills to bear in helping to start Green Guerrillas Youth Media Tech Trainee Program in December of 2004 for Southern Tier Advocacy and Mitigation Project, Inc. (S.T.A.M.P.), an Ithaca-based not-for-profit community organization that was established in response to the increasing frequency with which young people are referred to juvenile and adult court systems. S.T.A.M.P. challenges pollution, criminalization, exploitation, and incarceration by encouraging self-respect, empowerment, leadership, and self-determination among young people, adults, and families most affected by criminal justice and environmental policies which disregard individual needs, erode community assets, and undermine planet security. Beginning in the summer of 2005, I worked with other volunteers from the organization to establish a space for a digital media arts center focused on encouraging and empowering marginalized voices in the local communities. I met with local independent filmmakers and community members working in the field of renewable energy to examine the possibilities for designing and implementing a media technology training program for young people that would focus on sustainability and social justice issues. It was determined that the goal of this program would be to offer an exciting and dynamic job and life skills learning environment for teenagers who are at risk for criminalization and incarceration, while fostering greater knowledge of, and the empowerment to address, social, political, and economic issues that affect their lives. We welcomed the first cohort of Green Guerrilla Youth Media Tech Trainees in July of 2006 and have been in operation steadily ever since.

An examination of the history of the program's first two years, the dynamics of its learning environment, and the meanings that participants ascribe to their

experiences, informs this study. The process utilized was intensive participatory action research. There is a great deal of literature on this methodological approach and its various nuances. What it means for me, in this specific context, is that I would be an “embedded” researcher, working in partnership with the other members of the organization to develop a project that would be of relevance to the goals of the organization. It would serve as a form of critical self-reflection and documentation that could help the organization grow and evolve, as well as being inspiring and useful to others working in the fields of youth empowerment through critical consciousness and education for sustainability.

As one of the founders and a program coordinator for S.T.A.M.P., I am fully immersed in the operations and day-to-day activities of the organization. While there are always issues of potential bias to grapple with when a researcher is so closely linked to their work, in this particular context, it was the only way that a study could have taken place that would thoroughly investigate the complexities and nuances of this program that rigorous qualitative research requires. As I was, during the course of this research, and am still currently, the coordinator of the program and one of two primary adult volunteers, responsible for both hands-on technical instruction and larger issues of pedagogy and curriculum development, no one would have the level of access and trust with the research participants as I do. It is a closely-knit group and an outsider would not be privy to the openness and trust that I receive. However, it also required me to remain vigilant and critical about my own perspectives and potential biases in order to give the most honest and comprehensive assessment possible. Being influenced by several cultural, intellectual, and political traditions, which stress realistic and critical assessments of all aspects of life that are grounded by clear, coherent, and moral thinking, helped guide my paradigm and approach. By fully

documenting my role throughout the course of this study, I seek to provide readers of this thesis a sense of my influence on the research dynamics. As a participant researcher, I do not separate myself from the rest of the organization with pretenses of being an objective observer, hence you will find my presence throughout this thesis reflected in words such as “our” and “we”. I feel there is a great value in hands-on practitioners and community organizations being able to conduct research that is beneficial to their growth and development, whether this is on their own or in democratic and egalitarian partnerships with other organizations, individuals, and institutions that share a common vision.

It is my assertion that developing a successful new generation of leadership focused on a broad approach to sustainability requires that those who are directly impacted by the un-sustainability of imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, industrialism, and globalization, with all their attendant negative manifestations (e.g., racism, sexism, wars, and pollution), have access to the learning and communication tools they need to understand and critically analyze the world they live in, and effect positive change within it from a position of self-empowerment. To achieve broad sustainability in the environment and humanity-at-large, the poor and marginalized, particularly young people, must be able to increase their knowledge, voice, and self-determination through multi-media communications and storytelling in holistic and critical grassroots social learning environments that support their cultural backgrounds, as well as affording opportunities for engaging other cultures and ways of knowing. Young people play an essential role in examining, developing, expanding, and redefining dynamic definitions of sustainability.

The world's future, and our future as humans living within such an extraordinarily complex and humbling environment, is dependent on our ability to adequately educate and prepare young people to be good stewards of the earth upon which we are all dependent (Cajete, 1994, Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). Environmentally conscious future generations, equipped to deal with the myriad of pressing crises and challenges, can only emerge if societies invest their energies strongly in their children. Growing up in a technology and media-saturated environment, young people gravitate to hands-on learning approaches that involve multi-media communications tools (Tapscott, 1998). This is why Green Guerrillas uses digital media production activities as a key tool for engaging young peoples' interest in questions of social and environmental sustainability. In the late 20th century relatively affordable digital video production on a home computer became a reality and grassroots media initiatives throughout the world embraced this new accessibility.³ In the United States, youth media literacy and production projects have become prevalent in recent years with the significant advances in, and proliferation of, low-cost digital media technologies.⁴ The ability to share video through free internet services such as Youtube, BlipTV, Vimeo, Google Video, and a growing number of other smaller providers, will only serve to extend the potential for grassroots media efforts to distribute their works widely.

My central argument is that, within Green Guerrillas Youth Media Tech Collective, a supportive and holistically-oriented social learning environment utilizing

³ See Center for International Media Action at <http://www.mediaactioncenter.org> and the Alternative Media Global Project at <http://www.ourmedianetwork.org/wiki/>.

⁴ For example, Youth Rights Media in New Haven, Connecticut, Baltimore-based Wide Angle Youth Media, the Bay Area Video Coalition, Manhattan Neighborhood Network's Youth Channel, and Beyondmedia Education in Chicago. See Danielle Maestretti (2008) *The Kids in the newsroom* and the list of youth media organizations at Youth Media Reporter: <http://www.youthmediareporter.org/2007/05/links.html>.

multi-media tools is particularly effective for getting marginalized adolescents engaged in developing environmental and social critical consciousness, as well as fostering a sense of empowerment in their personal lives and their ability to generate social change. This supports them in navigating their own lives more in harmony with the environment and society, building the foundation for a just and environmentally conscious world where bio-cultural diversity is respected and protected. From my perspective, critical consciousness is engagement in a life-long learning process of investigating our reality as human beings in relation to each other and the natural world upon which we depend, freeing ourselves from conditioned thinking that supports exploitation and oppression. Empowerment is the sense of agency, as well as the possessing of needed tools and skills that allow one to feel confident in one's ability to be successful at her/his endeavors. Feeling a sense of hope for the possibilities for change in a modern world filled seemingly with never-ending problems of violence, oppressive social conditions, and environmental degradation comes from a foundation of empowerment. With critical consciousness and empowerment, young people are better equipped to relate to other people and the natural world, and have the potential to create meaningful change that can result in the equitable distribution and access of resources, the protection of human dignity, as well as the conservation of the other biotic and abiotic beings we share this planet with.

The stories told by these youth and the adults who work with them contain essential embodied practical knowledge and meanings that contribute an important perspective to the conversations around broad, interconnected concepts of sustainability. By critically engaging a diverse constellation of knowledge systems through media studies, media production, and civic participation through a holistic positive youth development approach, these future leaders become well-equipped to

create connections between a wide variety of fields and disciplines to manifest the dynamic changes in consciousness and practices that can challenge the destructive activities of modern industrial civilization and forms of political, social, and economic oppression and mitigate their damages in a way that is transformative and life-affirming.

As there are complex and symbiotic linkages between cultural and biological diversity (Kassam, 2008; Pretty et al., 2008), and biodiversity is essential for ecosystem resiliency, preserving important functions such as climate regulation (Royal Society, 2008), it is logical to posit that the conservation of cultural diversity will be vitally important in the quest to address global climate change. As technologic “solutions” to carbon dioxide emissions, such as the construction and utilization of more large-scale hydroelectric dams, can pose significant threats to biodiversity (Paterson et al., 2008), the engagement of diverse perspectives and ways of knowing, such as Indigenous and other forms of local knowledge, becomes an absolute necessity for guiding balanced decision-making with holistic analyses of the diversity of elements that comprise human ecological relationships. The reductionist nature of Western scientific thought, though very adept at devising technological innovations, is ill-equipped to deal with the multi-faceted conceptual nature of current environmental problems, not to mention that it is usually complicit in their existence and perpetuation in the first place. The holistic and synthetic orientation of many Indigenous worldviews hold keys to understanding “the bigger picture”, in which the linear and quantitative approach of Western thought serves its purpose, and is utilized for what it is best suited for, but does not dominate the discussion and the decision-making. Though Indigenous and local knowledge is primarily context dependent, developing out of a particular peoples’ interactions with a specific environment; there are

philosophical and metaphysical elements that can not only inform actions within specific ecosystems and bioregions, but also help guide more sustainable practices by other people in their relationships with their environments (Cajete, 1994; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

When more members of our diverse human cultures, particularly those coming from marginalized and oppressed backgrounds, have authentic opportunities for participation in meaningful conversations and decision-making regarding the sustainability of current environmental, social, political, and economic policies and practices, as well as access to democratic mechanisms and resources needed for self-determination, then the environmental integrity and bio-cultural diversity of our planet will likely be better protected from the threats of pollution, resource depletion, degradation of ecosystems, unmitigated climate change, social oppression, and cultural assimilation (Pretty et al., 2008). The social movements existing within, and emerging from, Indigenous and other grassroots communities provide powerful counter-narratives and examples of practical praxis challenging the un-sustainability of industrialism, colonialism, and neo-liberal economic globalization, while also providing examples of self-determination and critical ecological consciousness that takes place when the “soil of cultures” and the soil of the Earth are protected and nourished (Prakash & Esteva, 1998).

In a community such as Ithaca, where there exists an internationally known eco-village,⁵ it is not enough for only the young people who reside there to be groomed to be the next generation of leaders on environmental issues. Nor is it

⁵ Ecovillage at Ithaca is part of a global network of intentional communities whose focus is on environmental sustainability. It is both a suburban-styled residential compound with extensive natural areas and a not-for-profit educational organization. See <http://www.ecovillage.ithaca.ny.us/>

enough for Cornell University and Ithaca College to be entrusted to mentor these leaders through their various departments, activities, and initiatives. For a true natural democracy, as articulated by the original caretakers of this region, the Haudenosaunee (Akwesasne Notes, 1978), to flourish globally and locally, dialogues and decision-making must be fully democratic and open to the perspectives and stories of the “pluriverse” of humanity. Green Guerrillas represent a multicultural grassroots voice from a youth perspective that takes a pro-active digital media and public communications-based approach and refuses to be marginalized in discussions around the subject of sustainability. Through the use of digital media storytelling and other creative cultural expressions, such as hip-hop music, rapping, and visual art, this diverse multi-generational collective is committed to learning and sharing information about socio-economic justice and environmental sustainability, which, philosophically, is ultimately about freeing all forms of life from oppressive and destructive paradigms and practices. This research project investigates the learning dynamics of how the participants in this program become engaged in developing critical environmental and social consciousness and what that means to them, through the stories they tell. Of particular interest are their experiences and thoughts on formal schooling compared to learning within the program, and their development of a sense of empowerment through personal transformation and engagement with social activism.

In Chapter Two I will review a diverse variety of literature, drawing from several disciplines. The subjects of positive youth development, storytelling and communications for social change, and critical and multicultural environmental education all have relevance for understanding the context in which Green Guerrillas Youth Media Tech Collective operates.

In Chapter Three I will discuss how I came to use participatory qualitative research and narrative inquiry methods for this study. Utilizing a narrative structure, I will explore the development of Green Guerrillas program from my perspective, so that the context of this research and my role within it is understood. I will elaborate on my reasoning for choosing to use interviews, participant observation, and the organization's own documentation, as the primary sources of information that would provide an effective means of conveying an accurate understanding of the program for the purposes of this thesis. Through a self-reflexive awareness of my role as a participant researcher, I aim to give an honest accounting of my presence throughout the process.

In Chapter Four I will continue the narrative through an engagement with the program participants' own words. We will learn, from their perspectives and contexts, what the program means to them, individually and collectively, in terms of developing critical environmental and social consciousness, personal empowerment, and the ability to generate social change. I will explore how they ascribe meaning to the learning and activities they engage in as Green Guerrillas. Having a sense of purpose and being valued for their contributions to the local community and humanity-at-large has transformative effects on the development and consciousness of these teenagers, as well as a beneficial reciprocal learning dynamic for the adults who work with the program as co-creators of knowledge and lived culture, coming from different backgrounds and experiences into a shared context.

In Chapter Five I will conclude with a review and summation of what we have learned from this thesis. Although narrative-based qualitative research is, by nature,

context-specific, I will explore the ways in which this research project contributes to larger discussions about youth development, multimedia approaches to critical environmental and social justice community education from a radical and insurgent polycentric multicultural perspective, and storytelling for social change. I will also discuss what were found to be some limitations of this study. In closing I will offer my ideas for future research in this area.

Chapter Two Literature Review

You who are so wise must know that different nations have different conception of things. You will not therefore take it amiss if our ideas of the white man's kind of education happens not to be the same as yours. We have had some experience of it.

Several of our young people were brought up in your colleges. They were instructed in all your sciences; but, when they came back to us, they were all bad runners, ignorant of every means of living in the woods, unable to bear either cold or hunger. They didn't know how to build a cabin, take a deer, or kill an enemy. They spoke our language imperfectly. They were therefore unfit to be hunters, warriors, or counselors; they were good for nothing.

We are, however, not the less obliged for your kind offer, though we decline accepting it. To show our gratefulness, if the gentleman of Virginia shall send us a dozen of their sons, we will take great care with their education, instruct them in all we know, and make men of them.

Canassatego (Onondaga) - Treaty of Lancaster 1744

In this thesis, I explore the meanings participants and volunteers in Green Guerrillas Youth Media Tech Collective ascribe to their experiences working within a youth development program as they relate to how they experience learning within a multicultural multimedia storytelling environment focused on critical environmental and social consciousness, personal empowerment, and social change. All of them experience some sense of empowerment through transformative learning, in addition to demonstrating an awareness of the complexities and interconnections of environmental, social, political, and economic issues. I have used a narrative inquiry approach to explore the organization, first from my perspective as a collective member, coordinator, and as a researcher, then from the teens and one of the adult volunteers based on semi-structured interviews I conducted. The youth participants' stories are the primary focus of this thesis, as they impart an in-depth understanding of

the learning dynamics taking place within the program. These narratives reveal how the pedagogy of Green Guerrillas affects their worldviews and sense of agency. I feel strongly about the importance of emphasizing the youth voice in this project, as the key objective of the program is to provide avenues for their points of view to be heard. Too much research involving young people does not give them the opportunity to speak for themselves and actually be heard from directly.

A wide variety of literature helps provide a conceptual framework for engaging these narratives, as well as understanding the ideological influences of the program. Positive youth development, revolutionary communications and storytelling for social change, and multicultural and critical environmental education are all subjects that bear important relationships with the how and why of Green Guerrillas.

Positive Youth Development

Despite the proliferation of youth media programs around the world in the last 15 years, there is a general lack of literature in this area. During the writing of this thesis I received a Youth Media Reporter email newsletter with a new feature - academic articles focused specifically on the subject. Much of the information available thus far has been anecdotal and limited to newspaper and magazine articles. Most research that has been conducted was for internal purposes of evaluation for the funders of non-profit organizations.

There has been significant academic research on youth development organizations in general that I will explore along with that which is focused specifically on youth media groups. Out of some of this work have been the identification of the key components for successful positive youth development

initiatives and the development of best practices guides. The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2002) outlined the features of positive youth development settings as containing:

- Physical and Psychological Safety
- Appropriate Structure
- Supportive Relationships
- Opportunities to Belong
- Positive Social Norms
- Support for Efficacy and Mattering
- Integration of Family, School and Community Efforts

Young people, particularly those from marginalized populations, often have to contend with peer violence, as well as violence meted out from the state via police brutality. Being in an environment where they do not have to worry about fights, gang violence, and interaction with law enforcement is very important for establishing a sense of safety. Some may come from households where their psychological and physical well-being is challenged and/or threatened. Having a safe and healthy space to explore a youth development program's activities is a crucial component of an effective program. The structure of the program must be tailored to serve the needs of its particular constituency and the accomplishment of its goals. The relationships between the participants themselves and with the program staff must be one that fosters support for the participants' life goals as well as their overall sense of well-being. For a young person to feel invested in a program, there must be avenues for them to feel incorporated into the group, creating bonding and a group identity. Positive social norms include respect for racial, gender, and sexual orientation diversity; avoiding substance abuse and abusive relationships; emphasis on educational and work/career goals; etc. Having their actions be effective and matter to themselves, their families, their community, and society-at-large is particularly

important for young people, so youth development organizations must be supportive of these outcomes. By working in conjunction with the other major social elements in a young person's life - their family, school, and community - a program can holistically and synergistically support positive youth development.

Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) have outlined similar "Best Practice Strategies in Youth Development Settings" where:

- Program Goals are:
 1. Intentional
 2. Reflect positive developmental outcomes such as competency, confidence, character, connection, and contribution
- Program Atmosphere is:
 1. Supportive
 2. Empowering
 3. Expecting
 4. Rewarding
 5. Enduring (lasting at least nine months)
- Program Activities Involve:
 1. Building skills
 2. Authentic Activities
 3. Broaden Perspectives
 4. Activities that strengthen supports available in family, school, community

In addition to identifying some of the same attributes that the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine report does, Roth and Brooks-Gunn contribute some other important dimensions of youth development settings. The goals of the program must be well thought out and focused, seeking to achieve specific outcomes. These include competency in skills and decision-making, confidence in one's abilities, positive character development, the building of relationship connections (internally and externally in regards to the program), and avenues for youth participants to make

contributions to the program and/or their community and society. The atmosphere of the program should have expectations of its participants that they are encouraged and supported in meeting. There should be positive reinforcement through the use of rewards, be they material or recognition. The program should engage the participants in “real world” activities, as opposed to simplified or “watered-down” ones, that allow them to build their skills, expand their knowledge, and expose them to new perspectives. It is also vitally important that these programs be long-term so they can have a more lasting impact by having the necessary time to allow the youth to feel a sense of stability, belongingness, and investment in the program’s goals.

Other research has shown that youth organizations that are structured in a “Positive Youth Development” model have had good success working with disengaged and hard-to-reach teens (Wheeler, 2003). Although some adolescent demographics, particularly those defined as “at-risk”, shun traditional youth organizations, they do show willingness to work with ones that have avenues for authentic and meaningful (as opposed to token and superficial) youth participation and decision-making (O’Donoghue et al., 2006). Receiving stipends, having avenues for civic participation, exploring history, engaging in critical education, and creatively utilizing youth culture mediums are also effective for getting poor, working class, and marginalized teens involved in youth organizations (Innovative Center for Community and Youth Development, 2003). Guins (2008) has argued that popular and youth culture, which is heavily influenced by hip-hop, is particularly effective in getting young people civically engaged and politically aware. It can be used as a “stimulus for social change...and a platform for humanitarian ideologies against injustice” (p. 78).

Despite a nationwide decrease in juvenile crime statistics, trying and sentencing young people as adults has grown dramatically. State spending for imprisonment has grown on average to be six times as that for education (Wald & Losen, 2003). Young people, particularly those from communities of color, are being tracked into the prison system by processes that begin in the classroom and society in what is being termed a “school-to-prison pipeline”. Disciplinary issues that arise in schools are being referred to the criminal justice system with increasing regularity. The Advancement Project (2000) has found that “zero tolerance” and school disciplinary policies directly and indirectly feed this “pipeline”. It is not uncommon these days to read news stories about kindergartners and elementary school students being handcuffed and arrested with criminal charges being laid against them. The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund has conducted nationwide research on this phenomenon and concluded that persistent racism, manifested in failing educational policies and aggressive law enforcement practices is feeding young people of color straight out of school into the criminal justice system and incarceration at alarming rates.⁶

Youthtopias

Youth media projects, such as Youth Rights Media⁷ in New Haven, CT, whose work is credited with helping to shut down a controversial juvenile detention facility, have served as a counter-force to the school-to-prison pipeline by giving young people the tools to critically analyze and tell stories about issues that are important to them. Akom et al. (2008) have described these kind of programs as “youthtopias” where the

⁶ See NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund *Dismantling the school to prison pipeline*. For a brief overview of the situation in the state of New York, see NYCLU *School to prison pipeline fact sheet*.

⁷ See <http://www.youthrightsmedia.org>.

influences of critical pedagogy, Critical Race Theory, and critical media studies come together to provide liberating spaces for young people to engage their world in a meaningful quest for social justice. In addition to being maligned and discriminated against for their ethnicity, gender, class, and/or sexual orientation, youth are also marginalized for their age, which is reflected by vilification in the mainstream media where fears of teen criminal activity are stoked (Kelly, 2006).

“Youthtopias” represent a bulwark against discrimination by providing opportunities for some of society’s most marginalized populations to empower themselves through programs and activities based on their own youth culture that assist them to identify, analyze, and affect change upon issues they face in their lives and their communities. By providing a framework for unlearning stereotypes, false beliefs, and mental colonization, and engaging new and diverse perspectives, the critical consciousness engendered through this process assists their growth and development as individuals and as positively contributing members of society who are not only a key element of healthier families and communities, but are also well-equipped to creatively problem solve the challenges of the future. The programs can be formal or informal, but what they share in common is a committed approach to creating spaces where young peoples’ agency is enhanced through a collective commitment to social justice,⁸ libratory pedagogies,⁹ and transformative praxis¹⁰ through the power of telling their own stories using a variety of media.

⁸ Though, the term social justice can hold different meanings and implications when applied to a variety of contexts, from my perspective, it refers to equitable treatment of all people in society, as well as equitable distribution of resources and political power. It directly challenges injustices and discrimination, such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, etc.

⁹ These are teaching and learning strategies that are designed explicitly so that learners can liberate themselves from oppressive conditions.

¹⁰ Praxis, as articulated by Freire (1970) refers to the dynamic interplay and continuous feedback loop between theory and action. Transformation can take many forms such as the development of a positive self-identity and decolonization of the mind.

Storytelling and Communications for Social Change

Storytelling has played an integral role in maintaining a community's history and knowledge throughout human history. This holds true for Indigenous societies where knowledge and history is intimately tied to the practice (Cajete, 1994), as well as industrialized societies, where stories embedded in multi-media texts shape the perception and consciousness of the populace by establishing shared "common sense" interpretive frameworks, which may bear little semblance to historical or present realities (e.g., African-Americans running amok in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, weapons of mass destruction being present in Iraq, Black men raping White women, and Indigenous people being a-historical, "primitive", and "uncivilized"), but which serve to protect the status quo of unequal power relations and resource control (Stone-Mediatore, 2003). White supremacy, patriarchy, manifest destiny, genocide, and environmental exploitation are some of the dominant paradigms that are rationalized and supported through movies, comic books, novels, radio shows, and television commercials in Western culture (Shohat & Stam, 1994).

In the mainstream culture of the United States, storytelling has been infantilized and marginalized without any real consideration for the omnipresence of narratives in peoples' lives. Too often storytelling is situated as a quaint, non-threatening activity for children or as folk art (Neile, 2005). Ignoring for a moment the very long history and central importance of stories in most, if not all, human societies, one can still find a very rich contemporary expression in grassroots communities in the United States and around the world. Solinger, Fox, and Irani (2008), in the introduction to *Telling stories to change the world: Global voices on the power of narrative to build community and make social justice claims*, discussed the

rich variety of ways that activists, artists, and community members are using “the power that stories have to generate hope and engagement, personal dignity and active citizenship, the pride of identity, and the humility of human connectedness” (p. 1). They have asserted that in the early 21st century, narratives are becoming more widely recognized as a powerful medium for making social justice claims, protecting the environment, building solidarity coalitions, reclaiming history, and engaging in concrete actions. These grassroots storytellers draw on the transformative power of stories to move themselves from being victims to agents to socially-engaged public critics. Three examples of the power of storytelling in the service of social change, which are particularly influential on Green Guerrillas paradigm, can be found in the Algerian struggle for independence, the case of journalist and political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, and the Indigenous uprising of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico. They highlight the role of communications and storytelling through radio, film, and video.

Hearing Stories –Revolutionary Radio

Fanon (1965) highlighted the power and revolutionary potential of storytelling in the service of revolutionary anti-colonial struggle, stating, “[t]he example of Algeria is significant in this context. From 1952-53 on, the storytellers, who were before that time stereotyped and tedious to listen to, completely overturned their traditional methods of storytelling and the contents of their tales.... Colonialism made no mistake when from 1955 on it proceeded to arrest these storytellers systematically” (p. 241). When the stories became metaphors for the resistance of a people and their living culture in a struggle for freedom, the conveyors of them became a threat that had to be eliminated by the colonial power structure. The power of stories to motivate, inspire and inform was vitally important in this context.

Radio communications played an extremely important role in the struggle for Algerian independence. The phenomenon of broadcasted information and stories from the resistance became an essential part of the contemporary culture of Algerian society. Prior to the anti-colonial struggle, radio was not popular among the native people under occupation, as it was viewed as being produced and consumed by the French colonizers. However, the organized resistance saw the importance of usurping their monopoly of the airwaves.

The Algerian found himself having to oppose the enemy news with his own news. The 'truth' of the oppressor, formerly rejected as an absolute lie, was now countered by another, an acted truth. The occupier's lie thereby acquired greater reality, for it was now a menaced lie, put on the defensive. It was the defenses of the occupier, his reactions, his resistances, that underscored the effectiveness of national action and made that action participate in a world of truth (p. 76).

The contested terrain of information and knowledge became more intense as the Algerian resistance was able to take an empowered proactive position through the use of radio, reclaiming not only physical territory through armed struggle, but also philosophical claims to truth.

The introduction of battery operated receivers in to the local markets allowed most Algerian families to gain some informational access to the revolution taking place in their country. However, more than just simply the wholesale adoption of a new technology by a society, the rapid popularity of them represented the primary

means by which the general population could receive communications and news updates from the revolution taking place in their country. Fanon (1965) noted that,

[i]t was in the course of the struggle for liberation and thanks to the creation of a *Voice of Fighting Algeria* that the Algerian experienced and concretely discovered the existence of voices other than the voice of the dominator which formerly had been immeasurably amplified because of his own silence (p. 95).

The Algerian example shows the vital role that communications and storytelling played in the dynamics of an anti-colonial struggle that was successful in gaining independence through the articulation of empowered voices of self-determination that mobilized the consciousness of the colonized to struggle for their freedom.

Radio was the medium by which African-American political prisoner and death row inmate Mumia Abu-Jamal rose to fame and popularity in the 1970s. He was a featured reporter on public radio and was elected president of the Philadelphia chapter of the National Association of Black Journalists based on his reputation as a courageous and smooth-voiced radio personality. His case has brought significant international attention to the racist application of the death penalty and the suppression of political dissent in the United States. A committed revolutionary journalist from the age of 16, when he helped found the Philadelphia chapter of the Black Panther Party, Abu-Jamal was instrumental in the development of the national party's newspaper. He earned the nickname the "Voice of the Voiceless" from the grassroots people of Philadelphia for his in-depth coverage of issues of concern to the poor, disenfranchised, and oppressed. However, his stories that exposed racist police

brutality invoked the wrath of the notorious Philadelphia Police Department.¹¹ His trial and conviction for the shooting of a police officer, when forensics and witness evidence was demonstrably tampered with, stand as an example of American injustice to many people around the world. His supporters have highlighted the political nature of the case, and have successfully characterized it as the legalized lynching of a Black man for telling stories that threatened the status quo. Despite the fact that many people have been exonerated from Pennsylvania's death row (as well as in several other states) due to prosecutorial misconduct and trials tainted by racism, the courts have refused to acknowledge that Abu-Jamal's trial judge Albert Sabo, who has the distinction of sending more people to death row than any other judge in the United States, the majority of them people of color, was biased in his approach to the case. They have ignored the sworn testimony of a court stenographer who overheard him state, "yeah, and I'm gonna help them fry the nigger" in the courthouse during the trial (Lindorf, 2008). Abu-Jamal is the author of several books and continues to write weekly columns and record radio commentary from Pennsylvania's death row, despite his extremely limited access to a telephone. His struggle and his stories have reached millions and have brought a great deal of attention to the politics of incarceration, the prison industrial complex, human rights, and social and environmental justice issues in the United States, particularly the racist application of the death penalty. He has inspired new generations of independent revolutionary journalists and media makers

¹¹ It should be noted that this police department had the distinction, at the time of Mumia Abu Jamal's conviction in 1982, of being the only one in the country under investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice for widespread brutality and corruption. The 1978 police paramilitary assault on the MOVE Organization's communal home in the Powelton Village neighborhood, after a year long siege, was broadcast nationwide and immediately framed by the mainstream media, both local and national, as being justified, despite . Its blatant brutality forced the Carter Administration to appear to do something to deal with the situation in the "City of Brotherly Love". Abu-Jamal's coverage of the story, which was the only coverage in Philadelphia that didn't vilify MOVE and allowed them to present their position, was cited publicly as a threat by the mayor, Frank Rizzo, himself a former police commissioner. See *25 Years on the MOVE*.

in the struggle for a better world, including Green Guerrillas. Throughout history, the persecution (and murder) of journalists, who have risked their reputation and safety to bring important stories to light, has demonstrated how much the powerful feel threatened by the power of truth over deception through the telling of stories.

Seeing Stories: Film and Video

Commissioned by the government of Algeria after independence, *The Battle of Algiers* is viewed as a cornerstone in the development of the Third Cinema genre. It is noted for its realistic aesthetic and use of non-actors, including actual commanders and participants in the Algerian resistance as the lead roles in telling a cinematic narrative about what had taken place only a few years earlier. Revolutionaries, anti-colonial organizers, and activist filmmakers around the world have studied the film extensively. For the Black Panther Party and the Irish Republican Army, viewing it was a mandatory component of their political education. Its popularity stands as a testament to the potential for broad dissemination and influence of communications media utilizing a compelling story to serve the cause of revolutionary change (Riegler, 2008).

On January 1, 1994, the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect, an Indigenous voice arose in a remote part of southern Mexico that said “ya basta” or “enough is enough” to a political and economic system that puts profits before life. NAFTA’s implementation would ensure that Mexico’s markets would be flooded with cheap corn grown by American farmers benefiting from government subsidies, severely jeopardizing the livelihoods of Mayan and other Mexican *campesino* subsistence farmers. After centuries of genocide, colonialism, marginalization, and discrimination, the Indigenous people of Chiapas rose up to claim

their dignity and freedom. In the first public statement from the EZLN,¹² the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, they began their articulation of their justification in taking up arms in rebellion by utilizing a historical narrative.

TO THE PEOPLE OF MEXICO:

MEXICAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS:

We are a product of 500 years of struggle: first against slavery, then during the War of Independence against Spain led by insurgents, then to avoid being absorbed by North American imperialism, then to promulgate our constitution and expel the French empire from our soil, and later the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz denied us the just application of the Reform laws and the people rebelled and leaders like Villa and Zapata emerged, poor men just like us. We have been denied the most elemental preparation so they can use us as cannon fodder and pillage the wealth of our country. They don't care that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a roof over our heads, no land, no work, no health care, no food nor education. Nor are we able to freely and democratically elect our political representatives, nor is there independence from foreigners, nor is there peace, nor justice for ourselves and our children.¹³

Since that first declaration, the Zapatistas have used stories extensively in making their demands and viewpoints known to Mexican and international civil society. Their spokesperson, Subcomandante Marcos is a prolific writer whose stories and poems draw from Indigenous worldviews and a great body of world literature, often

¹² Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation in English). They are commonly referred to simply as the Zapatistas. For a detailed history, see Ramirez (2008) *The fire and the word: A history of the Zapatista movement*.

¹³ See http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/First_Declaration_of_the_Lacandon_Jungle for the complete text.

simultaneously.¹⁴ Spaces for other stories from participants in that struggle have also been created that give a sense of empowerment. Mora (2003) quotes a Zapatista woman who participated in the 1998 “Encounter EZLN-Civil Society” as saying, “how beautiful it was to share stories. I felt like a person and not like an animal” (p. 23). For her, the power of storytelling functions on a personal level that is connected to their larger struggle for social change.

Throughout the world, Indigenous peoples have been quick to utilize new communications technologies to preserve cultural knowledge, as well as communicate internally and externally to their communities, nations, and allies to address issues facing them as colonized, marginalized, and oppressed peoples. From satellite radio and television networks produced by Indigenous people of North America, to African oral storytelling traditions being infused into a Third Cinema filmmaking praxis with a distinctly anti-colonial agenda, to the unprecedented internet-mediated activism surrounding the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico – the importance of communications access for marginalized peoples cannot be overstated. Many communities around the world are utilizing video technology in their struggles to both protect their natural resources and human rights, and preserve a record of their cultural practices, songs, stories and other forms of Indigenous knowledge.¹⁵

Promedios/Chiapas Media Project¹⁶ is an excellent example of this. Activist filmmakers in the United States, in conjunction with international support, joined with Indigenous people from Zapatista autonomous communities to provide video equipment and training that would assist the struggle in Chiapas. Self-determination

¹⁴ See Subcomandante Marcos (2001) *Zapatista stories* for an English translation of a selection of these narratives.

¹⁵ See Lunch, N & C. (2006) *Insight's into Participatory Video: A handbook for the field* and White, S.A. (Ed.) (2003) *Participatory Video: Images that Transform and empower*.

¹⁶ See <http://www.promediosmexico.org> and <http://www.chiapasmediaproject.org>.

and control of knowledge dissemination and education has been key for those communities and are ultimately more important than then simply the competent use of a communications technology. Promedios/Chiapas Media Project has released over twenty documentaries on agricultural collectives, fair trade coffee, women's collectives, autonomous education, traditional healing, and the history of their struggle for land. These moving stories and transformative narratives are produced by Indigenous community members (especially young people) with little formal education, and more often than not, working without reliable sources of electricity. Their videos have been studied extensively by Green Guerrillas for whom the Zapatistas' struggle has been highly inspirational. The influence of the political ideology of *Zapatismo*, both within Mexico and globally, is a phenomenon that illustrates the potential for sustainable, anti-capitalist resistance that successfully challenges the amorphous heir to the colonial legacy: neo-liberal globalization, the modern so-called "New World Order". Though the Zapatistas initially engaged in an armed uprising, and do still maintain a guerrilla army, their success has come from their ability to reach out to the world through stories and communications technology, including extensive use of the internet by their supporters/allies, and increasingly themselves.

Multicultural Environmental Education

As the importance of bio-cultural diversity is being increasingly recognized, there is a concomitant need for new approaches to environmental education that understands the need for more diverse perspectives being brought to bear on the subject. Lewis and James (1995) in their assessment of environmental education have suggested that educators,

need to recognize more explicitly the social, economic, and political issues interrelated with environmental issues. This will allow educators to present the "big picture," and will help students to see the connections between the environmental issues affecting them most directly and other, interrelated environmental issues. This universality can be maintained if educators stress the connections between environmental quality and quality of life, rather than dichotomizing and prioritizing one over the other (p. 6).

Situating environmental issues in relation to other factors in their lives, especially those that are more immediately tangible and recognizable, allow learners to understand personally the complex connections that exist in human ecological relationships. This provides many opportunities for engaging students from reference points that make sense to their particular experiences and local environments. Global issues such as climate change and ocean degradation can be hard for many students to grasp, unless they are connected to their lived experiences of how power and privilege operate that can manifest in more immediate concerns such as violence at home, in their community, as well as the violence of poverty and social marginalization. An urban youth whose neighborhood is choked with diesel pollution, a local waste incinerator's emissions, and lacks access to fresh whole foods, not to mention has to cope with potential violence from law enforcement and gangs, and an educational system that does not serve their needs, may have a hard time articulating why whales, seals, and the ozone layer need to be protected.

As the world's population continues to urbanize at a fast rate, this should be a major consideration within environmental education efforts, in addition to dealing with the human developmental problems arising from "Nature-Deficit Disorder" as

described by Louv (1990). In the forward to Young, Haas and McGown's (2008) *Coyote's guide to connecting with nature: For kids of all ages and their mentors*, Louv states emphatically that the connection between young people and nature must be repaired and strengthened. Declining use of National Parks, plummeting enrollment in undergraduate conservation programs, and a major decrease in the purchase of entry-level outdoor equipment, in addition to less participation in youth sports leagues and bike riding, and a concomitant increase in childhood obesity, diabetes, and other health problems are signaling a major problem. However, it is a problem that can be addressed with outdoor experiences with natural environments.

Other recent research links children's and adult's physical and mental health, as well as cognitive functioning and creativity, directly to experiences in nature. It's not too much of a leap to say that a creative and intelligent individual hold the keys to a high-quality life. And, too, there are planetary emergencies to be dealt with. We certainly need young people with all of their available brain neurons firing to help solve these problems. Wildlife reserves, parks and greenbelts—and the creatures and plants that live within—also depend on an alert and caring political constituency—informed people—for their continued survival (p. xiii).

It should be noted that an essential component of Young, Haas, and McGown's approach to outdoor learning and ecological literacy involves storytelling. Multiple and diverse approaches and tools must be used to successfully get young people engaged with a tangible connection to nature and environmental issues for as Louv reminds us, "[t]he status quo isn't working, despite the best intentions of parents,

teachers and others who devote time and energy to help children succeed in life” (p. xii).

Running-Grass (1995) has suggested that there are four streams that come together in a confluence to form multicultural environmental education. They are the environmental justice movement, multicultural education (both of which have roots in the civil rights movement), environmental education, and critical pedagogy. He distinguishes this from conventional environmental education being directed at a “diverse” audience or being conducted in urban settings, as multicultural environmental education is commonly conceptualized. Rather, it is an educational approach that is influenced by and taught from multiple cultural perspectives. Multicultural education strives to create equitable learning spaces and students who are knowledgeable about and respectful of diverse cultures. Environmental education offers insights into the connections humans share with their local ecologies and the planet as a whole. Critical pedagogy contributes important analyses of how education is located within social structures and patterns of domination and oppression. He has argued that, in communities of color where environmental justice groups are operating, “new and innovative forms of multicultural environmental education are developing and making a positive difference for environmental quality” (p. 1).¹⁷

Though multiculturalism is becoming more commonplace in educational settings, with quite variable rates of successfully meeting its purported goals, there are many critiques of the way it has been presented and implemented in the United States (Flores, 2003; Giroux, 1997; Richardson & Villenas, 2000). As it can be used to

¹⁷ A great source for information pertaining to diversity issues in outdoor and environmental education can be found on the Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education website at http://aeoe.org/?page_id=79.

commodify and simplify cultures, as well as gloss over real issues of inequities of power and privilege, a democratic and “insurgent” approach to multiculturalism in education, as argued for by Giroux (1997), is “one that offers a new language for students and others to move between disciplinary borders and to travel within zones of cultural difference” (p. 238). Furthermore,

if the concept of multiculturalism is to become useful as a pedagogical concept, educators need to appropriate it as more than a tool for critical understanding and the pluralizing of differences; it must also be used as an ethical and political referent which allows teachers and students to understand how power works in the interest of dominant social relations, and how such relations can be challenged and transformed (p. 247).

In this assessment, the workings of power and hegemony are interrogated from an ethical position of empowerment that has the potential to create social change. Students are able to navigate the borderlands of different disciplines and cultures, which gives them the ability to critically understand and transform their reality.

The current conception of a “post-racial” society that does not acknowledge issues of power relationships and resource access and has historical amnesia results in multicultural “facelifts” to the American presidency and executive branch (e.g. George W. Bush’s cabinet containing the largest number of people of color at that point in history and the recent election of Barack Obama), where the hegemonic status quo of imperialism and domestic policy remain unchanged. Shohat and Stam (1994) have proposed the idea of polycentric multiculturalism as a radical power-disrupting

alternative to multiculturalism as a project of liberal pluralism in the West with its emphasis on tolerance and ethical universals.

The notion of polycentrism...globalizes multiculturalism. It envisions a restructuring of intercommunal relations within and beyond the nation-state according to the internal imperatives of diverse communities. Within a polycentric vision, the world has many dynamic cultural locations, many possible vantage points. The emphasis...is not on spatial or primary points of origin but on fields of power, energy, and struggle. The “poly”...does not refer to a finite list of centers of power but rather introduces a systematic principle of differentiation, relationality, and linkage. No single community or part of the world, whatever its economic or political power, should be epistemologically privileged (p. 48).

As the participants in Green Guerrillas come from a wide variety of cultural contexts and locations, with a shared focus on social and environmental justice, it is with an engagement and understanding of a radical and insurgent polycentric multiculturalism that the pedagogy of the program operates.

Indigenous knowledge, culture, philosophy, and traditions are also very influential upon the ideology and praxis of the program and have much to offer multicultural environmental education. While critical pedagogy can be quite helpful in analyzing the ways in which power and authority operate in society as well as in learning spaces, its intellectual foundation is grounded in some of the same assumptions as industrialism, capitalism, and neo-liberalism (Bowers, 2003).

Therefore, in order to achieve an ecologically-oriented educational praxis, critical consciousness development must be informed by the mythopoetic traditions of the many cultures of the world that emphasize a sustainable relationship between people and the natural world.

ChiXapKaid (2005) has noted that the process and meaning of storytelling, a crucial component of Indigenous cultures, not only gets more students engaged with learning, but is also an important part of decolonization praxis. By placing it as a central aspect of the learning process, education becomes “indigenized”.

Storytelling is a natural approach to education and that much of what has been missing in the education of Indigenous children is the cultural knowledge and appropriateness that is embedded in the stories of their people.... I have never seen or experienced boredom when a gifted Indigenous storyteller is sharing knowledge through a story. On contrary, I have seen Indigenous children captivated by the gripping details of what was being conveyed by a good story. My guess is that all teachers, not just teachers of Indigenous children, would benefit from being good storytellers (pp. 131, 133).

Hermes (2000) has suggested that successful teachers utilize storytelling and an engagement with the students that allow them to be agentic and creative in their learning process. This creates an environment where it is not an either/or proposition in regards to Western and Indigenous knowledge systems. Rather, it is one that fosters development of intellectual rigor in all aspects of learning. The student is grounded in their own peoples’ knowledge and traditions, in addition to being fully competent with the dominant discourse.

The storytelling tradition comes from what some have called an aural (rather than oral) tradition. Observation and listening are key aspects of this tradition. In the Pueblo tradition the Kokopele storyteller is the embodiment of human creativity and dynamic cultural expressions. Cajete (1994) has found that “tracking a story” is a metaphor for the path of vision and education.

Humans are one and all storytelling animals. Through story we explain and come to understand ourselves. Story – in creative combination with encounters, experiences, image making, ritual, play, imagination, dream and modeling – forms the basic foundation for all human learning and teaching.... The educational challenge of the twenty-first century is to move forward to basics. Indigenous education provides the clues and the tracks that we need to follow (p. 68).

Storytelling, working in conjunction with traditional ecological knowledge is key to Indigenous knowledge systems. Video, film, and radio, being effective mediums for storytelling, have been readily adapted by many Indigenous peoples.

Flores (2003) has argued that the realm of non-formal education holds great promise for transformative revolutionary pedagogy and praxis. He cites the example of the Zapatistas and their educational projects. One of their primary activities has been the creation of autonomous schools detached from the Mexican formal schooling system. In fact, shutting down the schools and evaluating how to proceed with a self-determined educational project was often the first thing done in liberated territories. Rather than focusing on educational reforms within the formal system, they have

developed their own sovereign spaces for learning to take place that serve the needs of their communities and where the word for teacher is not used to describe that role. Rather *promotore* or promoter (of learning) is utilized. This is a shared responsibility of many members of the community who facilitate an egalitarian learning environment without degrees and curricula mandated by the state. Their language, traditions, and culture, rather than being an object of scorn or derision, as they once were, become the foundation for a transformative libratory praxis. Interestingly, some teachers in the formal school system in Mexico have adopted materials generated by the Zapatistas' non-formal formal schools.

Compulsory formal education has served as a colonizing, assimilating, and homogenizing force. As Prakash and Esteva (1998) have articulated, formal education can be a Trojan horse of recolonization of grassroots communities who are connected to their land and community in a bio-cultural learning relationship that is generational in scale. What could not necessarily be accomplished through force and violence can be achieved through coercion of the mind. Assimilative education is designated as a form of cultural genocide under the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. In struggling to break free of oppressive conditions, new fronts in the struggle against globalization and dehumanization must be examined that are outside the confines of the classroom. This is the necessary challenge to the eco-cidal and genocidal tendencies of modern civilization. Through a re-connection to the lived cultures of the soil, grassroots people and communities can counter the homogenizing effects of globalization and become self-determined in their practices of learning that are relevant to their context, moving away from educational systems which perpetuate an intolerable status quo (Prakash & Esteva, 1998).

Participatory action research in non-formal learning environments has a great potential for realizing environmental education goals (Murdock & Krasny, 2001). It has been suggested that more research be done with marginalized children and their environmental relationships. Barratt Hacking et al. (2007) have found that,

[t]here is also the neglected issue of research with children being brought up at the margins of affluent societies; for example, children who are institutionalized, school truants and phobics, and children living in relative material and emotional poverty whose views on, and role in, social citizenship, social (and environmental) activity, for example, may well be quite different from those in more mainstream social settings (p. 539)

The teenagers in Green Guerrillas are of that demographic. Ithaca is a highly stratified and class-divided small college city. Cornell University and the wealthy residents of Cayuga Heights are located atop a hill overlooking the downtown area. Despite the existence of a variety of community outreach programs, including the county Cooperative Extension office; there is still a great divide between the town and gown, as well as the haves and the have-nots. The university is one of the largest employers in central New York. However Tompkins County, of which Ithaca is the county seat, consistently ranks as one of the poorest counties in the state according to the United States Census. The youth in the program come from a variety of low-income and working class backgrounds. Some have had experiences with institutionalization. Many of them feel alienated from school and have experienced racism there. Several have had contact with the criminal justice system themselves and through their family members, some of whom are incarcerated. They are also a fantastically inspiring

group of young people who have some very powerful observations about the state of society and the environment. The learning environment of Green Guerrillas is the incubator for that voice and expression.

Barratt Hacking et al. (2007) have suggested that young people critically explore and do research on what they term restorative environmental justice, focusing not only on justice for those specific children in a given context, but on the larger societal shifts for a more sustainable future for all youth. Eco-pedagogy, as articulated by Kahn (2008),

[h]as begun to pose problems into the way environmental education has become tethered to state and corporate-sponsored science and social studies standards, or otherwise fails to articulate the political need for widespread knowledge of the ways in which modern society and industrial culture promotes unsustainable lifestyles, even as it remains marginalized in the research, teacher-training and educational leadership programs of graduate schools of education (p. 9).

A critical examination of the concept of sustainability with a focus on justice is central to the work of Green Guerrillas. Connecting pollution to prisons and sustainability to social justice are two key phrases of the organization. Bowers (2003) has suggested that there are four eco-justice issues that can greatly expand what is taught in most environmental education programs:

(1) helping students understand the causes, extent, and political strategies necessary for addressing environmental racism;

(2) clarifying the nature of the ideological and economic forces that are perpetuating the domination of the South by the North;

(3) revitalizing the non-commodified forms of knowledge, skills, and activities within the communities represented by the students in the classroom—thus enabling them to participate in mentoring relationships that will develop their talents and interests, and to experience other community-centered non-monetized relationships and activities that will develop a sense of responsibility for the well-being of the community;

(4) helping students recognize the many ecologically informed changes in individual lifestyles and uses of technology that will help to ensure that future generations will not inherit a degraded environment (p. 10).

Environmental racism and global political and economic issues are two primary subjects of study within Green Guerrillas. Through watching documentaries, doing internet research, and reading newspapers, we all learn more about these issues and their relationship to our lives, as we critique the ideologies which perpetuate injustice and ecological harm. The teen participants are encouraged to “think outside the box” in terms of their education and career options. Building relationships with other members of their community who can share skills and other practical knowledge is strongly encouraged. A major component of the program’s activities revolve around examining the environmental impacts of the choices we make, from housing and transportation to food and clothing, not simply as consumers who are easily

manipulated by the “green-washing” of multinational corporations, but as critical thinkers who are deeply concerned about the unsustainability of modern civilization.

According to Freire (1970), “the oppressor consciousness tends to transform everything surrounding it into an object of its domination. The earth, property, production, the creations of people, people themselves, time – everything is reduced to the status of objects at its disposal” (p. 40). Development of a consciousness of interdependence is crucial to the practice of transformative learning (Parks Daloz, 2004). This comes with knowledge and experience of relationships. Cajete (2004) has argued that,

[t]he two quintessential problems that we face today as educators are both about relationship. The first is how are we going to get along with each other, which is the multicultural dilemma of social ecology, social interaction, and social relationship. And the second is how are we going to deal with our relationship with the natural world, which is in such total disarray. This is the physical ecology, how do we deal with the relationship to the earth and to all that is a part of the earth? These two quintessential problems form the context from which the “seed” of transformative education needs to begin to grow (p. 107).

The relationships within the inter-generational collective and the ones that are explored through our work provide fertile ground for new educational/learning paradigms to emerge. Through the stories told by the participants for this thesis we can see an example of how these ideas are put into practice.

Chapter Three

Doing Qualitative Participatory Research

When you give kids who've been stereotyped as not being able to do anything the chance to do something great, they'll step up.

Simon Hauger, West Philadelphia High School Electric Vehicle Team Coach¹⁸

Green Guerrillas History

In January 2006 S.T.A.M.P. secured an office space and began setting up the Guerrilla Griots Human Rights Media Arts Center¹⁹. The organization partnered with the Independent Television Service's Independent Lens Community Cinema series so that we could establish a local outreach activity and draw in the community support needed to be successful. In July and August 2006 S.T.A.M.P. held its pilot session for Green Guerrillas Youth Media Tech Trainee Program: a six-week, hands-on job skills training program focusing on computer skills, media literacy, documentary video production, critical thinking, and transformative learning around broad issues of environmental sustainability and social justice. We worked with two local agencies, Youth Employment Services of the Ithaca Youth Bureau and Tompkins Workforce New York – Job Link to secure a mechanism for the participants to have subsidized pay through their programs. For twenty hours per week, a group of four adult volunteers (including myself) trained four teenage participants. Coming in to the program, none of these young people had video experience beyond the casual use of a camcorder, nor did they understand the role mainstream media plays in supporting stereotypes that promote the status quo and perpetuate unhealthy behaviors. Most

¹⁸ CBS News (2006). *Kids build soybean-fueled car: Futuristic after-school project wows crowd at Philly Auto Show.*

¹⁹ A griot is a West African storyteller who preserves the oral history of their community.

were also unaware of the rich history of the struggle for social justice that was the subject of several of the documentaries we watched.

I was responsible for coordinating the activities of the program and developing the curriculum. Additionally, I did most of the instruction in the technical skills of video production and facilitated discussions about the documentaries we watched. We investigated both the topical content of the movies and the filmic aspects we liked and/or disliked. It is important for filmmakers to study others' work to see examples that can be used as reference, especially when first starting to learn the craft. Shot composition, sound quality, and editing all affect how well the movie is received by the viewer. The program taught the participants basic camera, sound, lighting, editing, interviewing, and researching skills. The goal was to complete a "blockumentary"²⁰ about local social justice and sustainability issues, in time for a mid-August screening premiere.

The three other adult volunteers who worked with the program that summer were able to contribute varied amounts of time to the program, as they were all working other jobs. Leslie Jones, the executive director of S.T.A.M.P., with an extensive background in community organizing, handled the financial and organizational logistics, while also contributing extensively to the editing and mentoring. Che Broadnax, an Ithaca born and raised filmmaker and hip hop artist shared his knowledge of film and music with the group. He continued to volunteer with the program for the next several summers. Sylvia, an artist and activist with experience in "DIY"²¹ media, participated as her work and parenting schedule

²⁰ A colloquial term referring to a documentary movie having an urban subject content and aesthetic.

²¹ Do-It-Yourself - a grassroots aesthetic and approach to creative endeavors.

permitted her to, helping out where she could on the shoots and with some editing. At the end of the summer she left Ithaca on a cross-country tour with her vegetable oil-powered diesel bus that was the subject of one of the video segments we recorded.

The volunteers' availability, particularly during the editing phase, was crucial to being able to complete a feature-length movie. While I have found that many people learn editing best when they are afforded large amounts of time to work with their footage and figure out their own editing process, the time frame we were working with necessitated intensive one-on-one instruction. Having one adult with some editing experience paired with each teen worked well, as they each had different levels of comfort working with the editing software. It should be noted that the software we use, Final Cut Studio, is a professional, industry-standard program that is very complex and has a fairly steep learning curve. Having the teen participants work with "real" equipment and not just "hand-me-downs" is an important part of our organizational and pedagogical approach.

The activities and field trips that comprised their training and work allowed the teens to experience working as a team; meet local documentary filmmakers; get their "hands dirty" learning how to run a diesel engine on waste vegetable oil, and watch and analyze films and videos connecting 500-year-old issues of prejudice, inequality, oppression, and discrimination with the increased use of policing, supervision, exploitation, and resource extraction nationwide and abroad. At the conclusion of the summer program, not only did they learn what renewable energy means, how it works and what they can do as consumers, future homeowners, and car drivers to reduce their personal dependence on fossil fuels and their carbon footprint; they also learned how to use digital media tools to document these topics, as well as other social issues

that are important to them, such as the effort to rename State Street in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.²².

As part of their “crash course” in camera and sound work, they practiced interviewing each other and myself. The next step was for them to go out onto the Ithaca Commons and interview a variety of people about their opinions on the renaming of State Street. They would continue to conduct these interviews throughout the summer program as we proceeded to investigate other subjects. I had arranged several shoots with local people involved in different aspects of renewable energy. Our first formal shoot was with Renovus Energy, a solar and wind energy installation company. Other shoots included Sylvia’s school bus that was used by social justice activists to do humanitarian work in post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans and attend anti-war demonstrations; a home under construction in the Northside neighborhood that showcased many different green building technologies; and Liquid Solar, a one-man operation that converts diesel vehicles to run on waste vegetable oil. The group also got to help shoot a segment for a music video for Che’s hip-hop group Cypher Dissident, though that was not included in our movie.

Each of the teens took on responsibility to edit one of the main shoots. They learned to use the editing software by working with the footage they had gathered, rather than following a tutorial. There was marked improvement in all of the teens with regards to their computer skills, video making abilities, and critical thinking. Their pre- and post-program evaluations demonstrated that everyone made substantial

²² Ithaca High School students from the first graduating Circle of Recovery life skills class decided to advocate for a major street in Ithaca to be named for Dr. King. There was a mix of community opposition and support during the four-year campaign for the name change. Eventually, on January 19, 2009, State Street was given dual name designation as Martin Luther King Jr. Street - a compromise solution that had actually been put on the table from the beginning by those who wanted the change.

progress in their knowledge of the movie's subject content and their technical skills. One participant, who had the least amount of experience, remarked at the reception after the premiere screening that he felt like he was now a "camera expert". He was also the participant who learned editing the swiftest. Being able to be comfortable with utilizing current technology to tell a story was clearly empowering for all of them. Everyone involved in the program was proud of these young filmmakers accomplishments and they were proud of themselves. In conversations with them and some of their families it was apparent that they all gained a strong sense of self-esteem from completing a project that would not only be distributed on DVD, but would also be screened publicly in several venues.

Though there were a few technical issues at the premiere screening of *Green Guerrillas v.1: Race Rap Renewable Energy* (hereafter *Green Guerrillas v.1*) at Cinemopolis, the independent art house theater in downtown Ithaca, overall the event was very successful. The collective and many people in the diverse audience of over one hundred people commented on how good the movie looked on the "big screen." There was a tremendous outpouring of positive feedback from the public regarding the screening and the program. Due to popular demand, we had to schedule a second screening on the Ithaca Commons in the amphitheatre, which was also very successful with a large audience turnout. By engaging in these outreach efforts, the program shares knowledge and information learned with the larger community - an important component in the social learning paradigm.

The program continued through the 2006-2007 school year meeting after school two to three days a week, and on Saturdays for a full day. The teens continued to study documentaries, conduct research, and record interviews with a wide variety of

people, from local community members working on sustainability and social justice issues to M-1, an internationally known hip hop artist, and Chief Gary Harrison, the traditional leader of the Chikaloon Village Dene in Alaska. The group participated in numerous community events and forums, sharing the teens' perspectives, as well as screening *Green Guerrillas v.1*, which was now being sold on DVD (completely professionally produced, packaged, and made 100% in-house by the group). One of the teens spoke publicly before the Mayor and the Ithaca City Council regarding the re-naming of State Street. Two of the teens along with two of the adult volunteers participated in a panel discussion of the critically acclaimed documentary *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, which focused on the issue of misogyny in hip hop music and culture.

To celebrate the end of the school year, we took a trip to Philadelphia, PA and New Jersey. We attended the Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Powwow and the Odunde (Nigerian New Year) Festival, getting to see some great cultural dancing and craft vendors. We also interviewed the MOVE organization, a revolutionary group who has been extremely outspoken about the un-sustainability of modern life since the early 1970s²³. At the Burlington County Earth Fair, Green Guerrillas interviewed the competitors of the 21st Century Automotive Challenge, who had their vehicles on display. There were electric vehicles, biodiesel vehicles and hybrids. Of particular interest were the ones made by high school students. West Philadelphia High School's EV Team had both their ultra-efficient biodiesel powered Volkswagen Jetta and the

²³ For a self-published, first person history of the organization, see *25 years on the MOVE* (1996). For an in-depth examination of the infamous 1985 police bombing of MOVE that resulted in the deaths of eleven men, women, and children, including John Africa, the organization's founder and coordinator, see "*Attention MOVE! This is America!*" (1987) by Margot Harry.

famous, award winning biodiesel-hybrid race car, the K-1 Attack²⁴. St. Mark's School, from Southborough, Massachusetts, also had a biodiesel fueled Jetta and an electric Ford Ranger pickup that is powered by renewable energy sources, including solar panels on the bed of the truck and a small portable windmill. It was inspiring for Green Guerrillas to see other teenagers involved in exciting projects focused on sustainable transportation. It seemed that for the students from those two schools it was exciting to be interviewed by a professional looking and acting video crew comprised of teenagers. Overall, the trip was a highlight of the year for everyone in the collective.

We had three more teens join the program in the late spring and early summer of that year. In the planning for the next movie we would be putting out, all of the teens in the program voiced the opinion that the first movie was too much like a conventional documentary and not exciting enough. They wanted it to reflect more youth culture, so it was decided it would be structured like an MTV News program, with the teens hosting different segments. It would be designed to be appealing to a young audience. Even though we had recorded some interviews throughout the preceding school year, we knew we needed to do several more shoots so that we would have a wide range of topics covered for the different segments. The time constraints of having only six twenty-hour work weeks to complete all the additional shooting and editing meant that we did much less movie analysis and political education than we did the first summer and throughout the previous school year.

²⁴ This vehicle has won the national alternative vehicle competition, the Tour De Sol, three times and, at the time of this writing, is part of the worldwide Progressive Automotive X-Prize competition. It is a powerful example of what young people can achieve. For more information on the team and their vehicles see <http://www.evxtteam.org>.

Green Guerrillas got to experience what it is like to work intensely on a project with a looming deadline, something quite common to the media industry.

The conclusion of the summer session saw the completion of another feature-length “blockumentary” that premiered August 17th, again at Cinemopolis. It was followed by a reception that featured Thai food made with local ingredients, raw food, and a dynamic question and answer session with the filmmakers and the local community who had come out in strong support. Once again, due to community demand, a second screening was scheduled a few weeks later on the Ithaca Commons, with another enthusiastic audience attending. A description of the movie, *Green Guerrillas v.2: Food Clothes Shelter Community* (hereafter *Green Guerrillas v.2*), as presented in the press kit, follows:

Summer 2007, Green Guerrillas Youth Media Tech Collective presented "a year in review," highlighting the latest in sustainable style, the community's response to racism in the Ithaca City Schools, the hottest and fastest fuel-efficient whips, and the modern impact of 500+ years of genocide and slavery on both sides of the prison wall in communities of color.

Featuring M1 of dead prez, Dan Hill of the Cayuga Nation, the 122nd exonerated death row prisoner Harold Wilson, green cribs, the MOVE Organization, Indigenous Punk Rock Band BLACKFIRE (Dine), the West Philadelphia High School Electric Vehicle Team, and Ithaca's Peoples Garden Project, the Blockumentary showcases stories of sustainability that challenge the status quo.

Incorporating animation, compelling personal stories, and a powerful soundtrack—featuring the Welfare Poets, dead prez, A-alikes, Warclub, One Way, J-San and the Analogue Sons, M-1, and an original theme song the youth created, “We The Movement”—Green Guerrillas use their creativity to advance their commitment to challenging current criminal justice and environmental policies which threaten their futures.

With the movie, the reception, and a teen dance after-party under our belts, Green Guerrillas took a two-day camping trip to a rural off-grid homestead where they were able to both unwind from the hectic pace of finishing a feature-length movie and learn more first-hand about sustainable living. It was a peaceful moment before the coming school year, which would see greater demands for screenings and outreach as the movies became more widely known, as well as tremendous upheaval and controversy in the Ithaca City School District (ICSD) around issues of equity and discrimination, particularly at Ithaca High School (IHS), where some of them were students.

Demonstrations at school board meetings and ICSD administrative offices, a student walkout at IHS, and threats of racial violence at the same time as national attention was being paid the case of the Jena 6²⁵, got Ithaca's school problems on to the first page of the Metro section in the New York Times.²⁶ Green Guerrillas documented the situation extensively and participated in many community forums about it, while organizing other students and community members, writing statements, and giving interviews to the press.

The teens in the program continued to study and practice documentary and narrative filmmaking, other multi-media forms such as graphic design and music relating them to their research and critical analysis on social, political, economic, and environmental issues that affect their lives. They also continued to do community outreach about the program, as well as meeting with educators, activists, and artists who wanted to share knowledge with them and learn from them in kind. In the fall of

²⁵ Six Black high school students were charged with second-degree murder for beating up a White student after several weeks of racial tension and intimidation that included nooses being hung from a "Whites-only" tree and a shotgun being pointed at three Black students in Jena, LA. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jena_Six

²⁶ "Tension Tied to Race Percolates in Ithaca (NY)". (2007, October 23). *New York Times*.

2007, Green Guerrillas started attending events featuring speakers on the subject of the prison industrial complex²⁷ at Cornell and Ithaca College. As some of the teens were very outspoken and articulate about social justice issues, they became noticed for their active participation in the discussions. The program offers all of these activities to provide them opportunities to work intra- and inter-generationally to develop both job skills and a positive sense of self-empowerment, so they can reach their full potential in life as they come into adulthood in a time when environmental problems, wars, discrimination, neo-liberal economic globalization,²⁸ and other forms of oppression continue around the world.

The culmination of this work was Green Guerrillas' participation in The Dream Reborn conference sponsored by the Oakland, California-based organization Green For All.²⁹ Well over 1,000 people attended the conference, which was billed as an opportunity for people of color and their allies involved in the environmental and social justice movements to come together on the 40th anniversary of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, in the city where it happened – Memphis, Tennessee – to continue his legacy and vision by linking the needs and concerns of grassroots

²⁷ According to Critical Resistance, a national prison abolitionist organization, "[t]he prison industrial complex (PIC) is a complicated system situated at the intersection of governmental and private interests that uses prisons as a solution to social, political, and economic problems. The PIC depends upon the oppressive systems of racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia. It includes human rights violations, the death penalty, industry and labor issues, policing, courts, media, community powerlessness, the imprisonment of political prisoners, and the elimination of dissent." See <http://www.criticalresistance.org/> and Davis (2003) *Are prisons obsolete?*

²⁸ Neo-liberalism advocates for mechanisms that make it easier for corporations to make profits in international and global markets through trade agreements, deregulation, and privatization of essential public goods such as water. This process of economic globalization of capitalism is widely recognized by labor and social justice groups to be extremely harmful to workers' rights, human rights, and the environment. The Zapatistas have been very outspoken about the threat of neo-liberalism. As the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle from the EZLN states, as translated by El Kilombo Intergalactico (2007), "capitalism is a system where the thieves are free and admired and used as model examples. And, in addition to exploiting and plundering, capitalism represses because it imprisons and kills those who rebel against injustice" (p.71).

²⁹ See <http://www.dreamreborn.org> and <http://www.greenforall.org>.

communities with the growing green economy. Four teenage participants accompanied by myself and Leslie Jones packed into a minivan (filled to the limit with not only all of our luggage, but also video equipment, and tabling materials) and drove sixteen hours, through torrential rainstorms at times, to make it just in time for the opening plenary. Green Guerrillas had a booth selling our DVDs, displaying informational boards the teens had put together,³⁰ and talking with hundreds of people who were very supportive and enthusiastic about the program. We also participated as part of the professional video crew documenting the workshops and plenaries, and screened excerpts from *Green Guerrillas v.2*. One conference organizer remarked to us that she felt, “Green Guerrillas are like the poster kids for the new green movement.” Over a dozen different grassroots organizations asked about the possibilities for teaching them how to set up a similar program in their community. It was a defining moment for the success and viability of the program.

In June 2008 we traveled to Philadelphia, as *Green Guerrillas v.2* was an official selection for the Philadelphia Independent Film and Video Festival. It was our first official film festival screening, which was exciting for all of us. Many of our friends from Philadelphia came out and several friends from Ithaca took a day trip there to support us and enjoy the good time. A former political prisoner from the Black Panthers, who had heard about our program, came from New York City and had lunch with us afterwards. His enthusiasm for the movie and the work we do with the program was very encouraging to all of us.

³⁰ The tri-fold display boards feature photos of program participants and activities, as well as information about renewable energy, the prison industrial complex, political prisoners, genetically modified foods, and hemp agriculture. They are designed to be eye-catching and visually appealing.

We started the summer of 2008 with two new teens joining the group. Our first activity was preparing for the 2nd annual Summertime Block Party. As one of the co-sponsors of the event, we had several responsibilities in addition to videotaping the festivities and having a booth. During the first week of July, prior to the event, we went to an organic strawberry farm and picked several gallons of berries. Two days later we went to Cayuga Lake Creamery in Interlaken and made strawberry ice cream that would be served at the block party. This activity was extremely well received by the teens, who enjoyed having a hands-on experience making a food that they all enjoy. Two attractive, full color banners with photographs of the process were hung over the ice cream stand at the event. The owner of the creamery let all Green Guerrillas have as much free ice cream and sorbet as each person wanted. Two of the teens also participated in the fashion show sponsored by the local “sustainable style” clothing store, Tuff Soul. A number of other local organizations that are focused on sustainability topics also had booths demonstrating solar cooking and providing information about the environmental impacts of paper and plastic grocery store bags.

The summer of 2008 also saw the program focus on a new movie project. Everyone in the collective who was involved with the production of *Green Guerrillas* v.2 felt that getting a feature-length movie done by the end of the summer work period had been particularly strenuous, having set a higher standard for ourselves in regards to production value goals, which resulted in much less time being spent on media studies of historical documentaries and critical analysis of current affairs. Several members of Green Guerrillas, who had been in the program prior to that summer, commented on the importance of not neglecting our discussions and “political education” films. Therefore rather than working to complete an entire movie and screen it by the end of the summer, as we had done the previous two summers, it was

decided that we would take a slightly slower pace, focusing on more critical analysis, political education, and media studies, in addition to shooting footage of our participation in hands-on experiential learning on the subjects of biodiesel production and waste vegetable oil conversion for diesel engines.³¹ The decision to change the pace of that summer evolved from an organic process of self-analysis within the organization, which is an important aspect of our pedagogical approach.

Seeing the value in our ability to travel, share our work, and network with others, along with a desire to lessen the environmental impact of that travel, prompted us to acquire a diesel vehicle for the program. We raised the needed funds and purchased a used 21-passenger bus off of eBay. For our first activity with the “greening” of the bus we worked with the Ithaca Biodiesel Co-op, videotaping the process of making fuel from local restaurants’ waste oil. The teens all got to participate in the various aspects of the manufacturing process, taking turns between documenting and working. Even though they did not find it to be particularly exciting (they gave it a “coolness” factor of 5 on a scale of 1-10), we all agreed that it was empowering to make a batch of “environmentally friendly” fuel, some of which would be for our bus.

The next activity was to convert the bus to be able to run on straight vegetable oil. We enlisted the help of Lucas Macdonald, a local diesel mechanic and conversion specialist. Green Guerrillas nicknamed him “the Organic Mechanic”. With his guidance, the whole group got hands-on experience with the conversion process. Everyone took turns taking pictures, recording video or doing work on the

³¹ Biodiesel is a chemical process and engine conversion is a physical process by which vegetable oil is made less viscous so it can be burned efficiently and not clog up fuel delivery systems when ambient temperatures are low.

bus. It was a time-consuming process, but the results were well worth it. Everyone had a lot of fun with the project, especially on the last day when we shot an interview with Lucas explaining how the conversion system works and sharing his thoughts on sustainability issues.

With the bus filled with a biodiesel blend in the main tank and waste vegetable oil in the secondary tank we were ready to take a trip. We had been invited to show our work at a grassroots gathering in the Catskill Mountains organized by young people called the Northeast Climate Confluence. We were excited to be able to drive there without using regular petroleum diesel, doing our small part to reduce carbon emissions and pollution, as well as being able to meet other people sharing similar values and concerns regarding society and the environment. The confluence “Points of Unity” statement reads, in part, “We recognize that the systems that are destroying the planet are systems rooted in colonialism and oppression. We recognize, therefore, that combating climate change is not solely a matter of addressing carbon emissions, but also confronting the institutions that attack our communities and cultures as well as our earth”.³² The event tied together a critical analysis of issues of Indigenous sovereignty and land claims (including Palestinian self-determination), grassroots disaster response, false solutions to climate change, reproductive justice, environmental justice, food sovereignty, immigration raids, political prisoners, animal rights, and the militarization of borders.

It was particularly exciting to see that the organizers had put together a “youth track” section of the confluence that was exclusively for teenagers. There were other youth groups there from Boston, MA and Providence, RI. It was a great opportunity

³² See <http://www.climateconfluence.org/blog/category/basics/pointsofunity/>.

for Green Guerrillas to network with peers who are also working with community organizations on social and environmental issues. As the confluence “Points of Unity” goes on to state, “We believe that successful solutions to climate change and social injustice will be community based, defined by those most affected by climate change, and practiced by those who have been systematically excluded from institutional decision making”.³³ While the teens participated in the youth track, Leslie Jones and I facilitated two workshops and participated in the panel discussions on prison issues and Native land rights and environmental issues. The teens also shared a PowerPoint presentation that they had put together about our program and the work they do with the other youth present. We screened *Green Guerrillas v.2* to a large audience and received very positive feedback. The event was held at a retreat center in a beautiful location along a river. Everyone camped out and had a very enjoyable time learning and networking with a friendly and diverse group of people.

When we returned from the trip, we started working on editing the footage that we had shot over the summer. It was a tedious and time-consuming process, as we had gotten over twenty hours of tape recorded just on the biodiesel and conversion projects. To break up the work we also watched several movies and had discussions. We finished off the summer with another trip to Philadelphia to show excerpts from *Green Guerrillas v.2* in conjunction with Scribe Video Center’s Street Movies series. Throughout the summer, they screen a variety of films in different outdoor venues throughout the city that are free and open to the public. The movie was well received by the audience and we got to meet other people who are working on interesting youth development programs there. It was especially meaningful for us to participate in Street Movies, as the Scribe Video Center, as mentioned in the introduction, was one

³³ Ibid.

of the inspirations for us in starting the Guerrilla Griots Human Rights Media Arts Center.

Throughout this period of development we have seen one of the original teens from the pilot cohort return to the program as a volunteer facilitator one summer. She returned to her home reservation territory to assist with several media projects in the community and local schools and is in the process of starting her own independent video production business. Other participants in the program have graduated from high school; earned their GED; joined Job Corps; and started community college. The ones who remain in school have shown a commitment to their academic success and their career goals that is very favorable. Professors at events we have attended at Cornell and Ithaca College have remarked that they wish their students were more engaged and exercising critical thinking skills like Green Guerrillas. We have seen a tremendous outpouring of support and solidarity from a diverse array of people and organizations. The program continues to grow organically finding new subjects to study and document, as well as new opportunities for conducting outreach.

It should be noted that throughout the program, significant challenges did arise in the lives of the teens that were dealt with either solely by the adult staff or the entire collective, depending on the sensitivity of the matter. Disciplinary issues with school, contact with law enforcement, pregnancy, substance abuse, and depression were some of the main issues that came up. This is not surprising given that the majority of participants in the program are coming from communities that have been marginalized within mainstream society. The holistic “second family” nature of the group and the close relationships between all the members facilitated the use of constructive approaches to challenges that arose. However, an in-depth discussion of that aspect is

beyond the scope of this study. It is sufficient just to mention that it is a factor that is present in the scope of the organization's workings. One of the original cohort of teens and one of the teens interviewed for this project were incarcerated at the time this thesis was published.

At this moment, seventeen teens have been a part of the program at one time or another, though never more than six at a given time. Some youth programs focus on serving large numbers, whereas we felt that a generally smaller group would be most effective pedagogically and logistically for our program. It is important to us to be able to offer a holistic learning environment where each participant feels they are receiving an appropriate amount of attention and direction that is supportive of both their development as individuals and as a collective. Given the media production nature of the work of Green Guerrillas, it was also important for each teen to have access to their own computer and not have to share a workstation. Though sharing is an important part of the group's pedagogical and philosophical foundation, I have not found it effective for teaching multi-media production and research with computers, particularly with this age group. Though it can sometimes be helpful for the teens to team up for specific tasks, it has been my experience, in instances of collaborations on one computer, that one person feels more comfortable with the software than the other. This leads to an imbalance in the experiential hands-on learning aspect, as one person tends to do more of the work.

Green Guerrillas Youth Media Tech Collective is a diverse multicultural group. The teens and the adult volunteers have come from a wide variety of cultural/ethnic backgrounds: African-American, Afro-Columbian, Afro-Caribbean, Chinese-American, Chicano, Haudenosaunee (Seneca and Mohawk), and Russian-

American. Several people were/are of mixed backgrounds. Discussions around racism, colonialism, peoples' history of struggle, and culture are a regular part of the program. By striving to engage the history and culture of all the members of Green Guerrillas, everyone's identity and background is respected and understood. There is also a connection through music, as the majority of the teens and the adults are connected to hip-hop and popular culture in varying degrees, which is often used as both a common reference and a unifying point.

The program addresses all the different aspects of a positive youth development setting as outlined in the last chapter. In addition to utilizing youth culture as an integral part of the program, teen participants are paid a stipend. Through the program's activities, youth participants develop skills in media literacy, media production (video, audio, and graphic design), public speaking, critical thinking, and researching. Positive social norms are reinforced through adherence to "Green Guerrillas Guidelines" that establish expectations for behavior of all the members of the collective, teen and adult. The teens participate in all decision-making aspects from editing to admitting new members. The "youthtopian" framework is incorporated through the creation of a safe space where critical discussions about potentially sensitive topics such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination take place in connection to other social, political, economic, and environmental issues. Through regular internal discussions about how everyone is doing at school and at home, as well as the use of program evaluation materials,³⁴ assessments are made about how well the program is meeting the participants' needs and how well participants are meeting the expectations of them. The majority of the

³⁴ An excellent evaluation tool is the *Youth and Adult Leaders for Program Excellence: A practical guide for program assessment and action planning (YALPE Resource Kit)* available from Act for Youth at <http://www.actforyouth.net/?yalpe>.

teens stay in the program for at least a year, so long-term relationships can be developed as they are supported in making positive decisions about myriad aspects of their lives.

Coming into a Narrative Methodology

Finding a methodology that would effectively convey a deeper understanding of the program and the youth participants' perspectives proved challenging at first. From the onset of the program, we had collected a variety of information from and about the teens. Everyone, when they started the program, filled out a questionnaire that was designed to gauge their knowledge about various aspects of sustainability, prison and criminal justice issues, and social justice issues. We found it helpful to get a baseline impression of what they already knew about these subjects. As part of their orientation to the program and media production they also recorded interviews with each other. Leslie Jones and I also kept extensive notes about program activities, comments made by the teens and their parents, as well as our own thoughts about how the program was developing. We constantly shared with each other information about things the teens had said, to issues we were aware of in their family and their lives, to how they were doing with learning certain skills and analyzing different topics we were working with in the program. An organic process of learning through documentation and self-reflection guided the decisions we made about the program, both as the adult coordinators, and as participants in a collective with significant youth-led decision-making.

Grounding myself in the fact that this was an environmental and social justice multi-media education program and my chosen field was natural resources with a minor in education, I set out to have the research investigate the organization's

learning dynamics as they pertain to developing critical environmental and social consciousness as well as the teens' sense of empowerment. The transformative holistic learning environment of Green Guerrillas is a complex set of relationships between a relatively small group of teenagers and adults. It would be hard, if not impossible to reproduce a rich and nuanced sense of the work of the program solely from the results of survey questionnaires or quantitative, positivistic methods of inquiry. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to take a class on narrative inquiry that introduced me to a broad literature on qualitative social science research that helped me craft a research plan. With the kinds of questions I was exploring and the nature of the research context, it became apparent that some form of qualitative research would be the most appropriate method for me to utilize. Qualitative methodologies have been used, with growing popularity, in recent decades in educational, organizational, and other social science research. As cited by Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), Denzin and Lincoln's (1994) *Handbook of qualitative research* offers the following definition:

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter...qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials...that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives (p. 4).

As a participatory researcher, I am immersed in the natural setting of that which I am researching. Meaning, interpretation, and action are the areas of Green Guerrillas' experience that I wanted to explore and understand.

The literature on decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 1999; Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2005) had been helpful for reminding me of the importance of keeping

this research project respectful and relevant to this community organization's members participating in it. Additionally, the emphasis on the importance of utilizing interviews and oral accounts in conducting research was vital in affirming the need for my turn to a focus on the stories the participants in the program could tell about their experiences in it. Narratives play a very important role in Indigenous knowledge systems and are central to the work of Green Guerrillas - which is itself strongly influenced by Indigenous worldviews and epistemologies. Stories are the fundamental and most ancient method of ordering and understanding our knowledge and experiences (Cajete, 1994; Seidman, 2006). Given the storytelling nature of the work of Green Guerrillas, it seemed a natural fit to document the stories and thoughts of the program participants as the key element of the research.

Narrative inquiry is the methodological framework, I came to learn, that would likely be the most effective for getting to the essential information being sought. It is particularly suited to exploring areas of knowledge that other data collection techniques miss (Maxwell, 2005). What sets narrative research apart from some other forms of qualitative research that also collect and /or construct stories, is that "[n]arrative inquiry embraces narrative as both the method and phenomena of study" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5). By conducting in-depth interviews and utilizing techniques of narrative analysis, multiple intertwined themes emerge as multiple stories unfold, revealing the meanings ascribed to certain people, events, and actions by the storyteller. Interviewing the teen participants to get their perspectives on the topics the program deals with and the stories they could tell about their own lives in relation to the program became the core of this research. By combining those interviews with the field notes and journals that both Leslie Jones and I had been writing, as well as an interview with Che Broadnax, our most active other adult

volunteer during our first two years, I would be able to provide the kind of depth that I felt would do the program justice.

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) suggest that there are four characteristics that reflect a researcher's "turn toward narrative":

- (1) a change in relationship between the person conducting the research and the person participating as the subject...,
- (2) a move from the use of number to the use of words as data,
- (3) a change from a focus on the general and universal toward the local and specific,
- (4) a widening embrace of alternative epistemologies or ways of knowing (p. 7) .

The change in relationship is a turn away from the claims of a position of objectivity as defined by positivistic and realist paradigms, towards a research framework that concerns itself with the interpretation and understanding of meaning. The researcher and the researched come together with their particular backgrounds and worldviews engaging in a dynamic learning relationship that affords the opportunity to understand more clearly themselves and that which is being researched. With this turn, a researcher understands that these relationships, of which they are a part, cannot be isolated and reduced to experimental controls, satisfying needs for predictability, objectivity, and ability to be generalized. Rather they are a dynamic set of interactions that change and evolve throughout the course of the research and beyond. The second turn, towards using words instead of numbers as data, locates this research as being totally distinctive from statistically driven social science research. The third turn, from the general to the particular, stresses the move away from positivistic research from which grand theories and narratives could be constructed. Liberation movements in the Third World, as well as the civil rights movement and the women's

movement in the United States, helped create grassroots spaces where stories were valued and narrative could flourish. The dualistic orthodoxy emanating from the Cold War was being challenged by the diversity of global humanity struggling to preserve and protect their cultures through a focus on the local and particular context. The fourth turn towards narrative is an understanding that there are many ways of knowing and understanding the world and human experience. The philosophical basis of positivistic epistemologies coming from the Enlightenment has come under close scrutiny and criticism from a variety of quarters. This has opened up many insights into the nature and practice of science, as scientists and social scientists outside of mainstream scientific culture have begun to investigate the foundational assumptions of their fields (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). There is also a growing movement around the study, preservation, and utilization of Indigenous and local knowledge. As the Zapatista saying goes, “Un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos” - a world where there is room for many worlds.

The participatory action research paradigm provides a framework for engaging the research participants as informed and agentic co-researchers, contributing their input and insights throughout the process so that the research itself is relevant, beneficial, and valid for their community’s own needs. It can be well suited to environmental education projects in non-formal educational situations (Murdock & Krasny, 2001). Greenwood and Levin (1998) have pointed out, action research has the potential to produce accurate, reliable, and useful information about social phenomena. Throughout the process of developing and conducting this research project I was engaged in dialogues, both formal and informal, with the teens and the other volunteers in the program to develop both analyses and critiques of the work being generated, to ensure that it is valid, authentic, and conducted with the highest of

ethics. Clandinin (2007) has stated, “narrative inquiry is a profoundly relational form of inquiry. Therefore, ethics plays a central role throughout and beyond the research process” (p. xvi). The product of this research must be both accountable and valuable to Green Guerrillas program as a whole and not be solely for the benefit of my academic pursuits. The ultimate validation comes from all the research participants themselves, who have had the opportunity to review this thesis to ensure that it accurately reflects what they have shared.

By practicing a great amount of self-reflexivity in my role as both a researcher and the coordinator of the program, I have sought to address validity and bias concerns as they pertain to my influence on the study. There is always the risk of losing perspective when being tied too closely to one’s work. Objectivity is often lauded in research; however, there are some limitations to what an outside researcher can accomplish, especially in the context of a youth organization. Trust is a major factor in working effectively with young people, whether doing research or not, particularly with those that are labeled at-risk or who are marginalized. A participatory researcher like myself, who is fully engaged with all aspects of the program from day to day activities to long-range planning, is privy to information and insights that would be difficult for an outsider to gain access to. Additionally, the trust that I have developed through long-term close interaction with the teens in the program makes them comfortable with opening up to me in interviews, especially when it touches on personal aspects of their lives. It is for these reasons that I do not separate myself in the narrative from the group to give a sense of objectivity. I am inextricably intertwined with this narrative, not only as a co-founder and co-coordinator of this program, but also as a member of a special family-like collective.

Being open about my role, while maintaining a critical eye that comes from a desire to engage in a constructive development through self-analysis of what works and does not work for the program, I offer an honest accounting of this research project. As noted earlier, I drew on a diverse set of experiences and cultural referents to provide guidance for both upholding a high ethical standard and maintaining a realistic lens with which to see this research endeavor. The only “downside”, in my estimation, is that such a participatory approach requires rigorous introspection and self-analysis, something that all researchers can benefit from, particularly ones who feel that they are perfectly objective about their work. Our knowledge and experiences are filtered through socio-cultural references and conditioned thinking patterns that make up our individual life stories and shape how we categorize, analyze, utilize, and discard information we are presented with, which affects how we approach any communicative endeavor. During the course of this research, a graduate student in education interviewed me at length about my work with Green Guerrillas and our pedagogy for a project she was working on. Reading the transcript several times was extremely helpful in my own process of self-analysis.

The greatest challenge was figuring out the specific research focus. A program like this could be examined instrumentally, answering simple questions about improved school grades or levels of civic participation, but it would lack depth that can be accounted for with narrative inquiry social science methodology (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Narrative inquiry is best suited for the types of situations that are complex and highly interrelated, often making it difficult for the researcher to start the process with a clearly defined research question (Clandinin & Connelley, 2000). There were many times that I felt overwhelmed by all the different possibilities for inquiry, knowing that there had to be a limit and a focus. It did not help matters any to know that this work

would likely serve as the basis of my doctoral research, which would include an even broader and more comprehensive long-term analysis of the program. However, by using Maxwell's (2005) approach to qualitative research design, I was able to use an iterative process to develop the purpose, focus, and theoretical background that would ground my research, as well as generating the questions that would be used for the interviews. By remaining open to the information I would encounter, as he suggests, my own research questions and focus became more clear through the process of documenting, transcribing, and editing the narratives themselves as I became immersed in the stories of everyone's experiences. The more time I spent with the transcripts and the notes, the more I learned to trust my instincts about what I was seeing. As Seidman (2006) advises, "[w]hat is of essential interest is embedded in each research topic and will arise from each transcript. Interviewers must affirm their own ability to recognize it" (p. 118).

The teens' participation in the program and their identities are no secret, as they are featured in the movies and other media produced by the program. They have spoken out at numerous community events, screened their work at film festivals and conferences and generally have a high visibility in the Ithaca community. However, since all of the teens are dealing with challenging issues in their lives, it was important for me to assure them anonymity for this research, since it could potentially touch on some sensitive aspects of their personal lives. Additionally, I would be asking them questions about their experiences with local formal education institutions and school officials, of which many of them were highly critical. They will only be identified by a pseudonym. Though some narrative research focuses on creating profiles, I feel it is the thematic elements that are the most relevant to this conversation, in addition to attending to the ethical considerations.

The five teen participants interviewed for this study had all been in the program at least one year at the time the interviews were conducted. Two had been in the program for almost two years and one for over a year and half. Drawing on my background and experience in documentary filmmaking, where I have interviewed well over a hundred people in a great variety of contexts, and reflecting on the advice in Seidman's (2006) *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*, I devised a set of questions that would serve as the basic framework for the interview. The questions I developed for the interviews were designed to elicit responses that would provide insight in to how the program had affected their lives and their outlooks on environmental and social issues, as well as their experiences with education both in school and with the program. By taking a semi-structured approach, I could tailor each interview to what I knew about the individual's background and experiences as well as being able to pursue new lines of questioning based on what their responses were.

The interviews were conducted in the summer of 2008 at the Guerrilla Griots Human Rights Media Arts Center. By engaging them as co-creators of knowledge and active participants in the research, the teens felt a sense of investment in the process, which helped create a relaxed atmosphere. The trust that I had built up with them was tremendously important, as I noted earlier. They were used to being asked to make decisions and work collectively to come to consensus about group activities so engaging them in the research process in a participatory manner was logical and necessary.

For the sake of readability, I have edited out some colloquialisms, such as the frequent use of the word “like” by all the teens, although I did leave some in when I felt that removing them would significantly alter the meaning of what was being said. “...” is used both to denote parts of the interview that were edited out, as well as pauses in their responses, particularly when they did not fit conventional written grammar. I feel this provides the reader with a sense of how things were stated conversationally.

Chapter Four

Interviews

It is in the expressions and behavior of the young where one really begins to gauge whether a teaching process has been successful in conveying these messages, these understandings of life, culture and relationship.... It is this mixture of perspective, understandings and action that come together to form the basis of Indigenous education.

Gregory Cajete (Tewa)

The responses have been grouped thematically in categories that emerged as I worked with the transcripts, reflecting on my research plan, my initial questions, and how they related to what everyone was saying in the interviews. I will explore them in the context of the following research questions:

- How do the members of Green Guerrillas Youth Media Tech Collective express environmental and social critical consciousness?
- How do they perceive the connections between social, political, economic, and environmental issues, both locally and globally, and their relationship to them?
- With that knowledge, in what ways do they situate themselves, their actions, and the decisions they make about their lives?
- What are their experiences with and opinions about education and how do they compare the learning environment of the program with that of formal education?

- How do these teens develop a sense of empowerment and agency through involvement in the multicultural learning environment of Green Guerrillas Youth Media Tech Collective?

Sustainability

Green Guerrillas Youth Media Tech Trainee Program has set out to redefine sustainability in terms that make sense to us. From our perspective, the same ideologies that produce pollution and climate change also produce racism, educational environments which feed a school to prison pipeline, police brutality, the genocide of Indigenous people, the oppression of immigrant communities, as well as the expansion and rationalization of economic systems that are dependent on prison labor, sweatshops, and extractive industries. As Che articulates, “part of the curriculum at Green Guerrillas involves learning to connect the dots between social justice and environmental justice. Youth participants learn about this matrix directly through anecdotal evidence, documentary films, and interviews with a wide range of sustainable farmers, activists, organizers, and engineers”. Throughout their involvement in the program, the participants have the opportunity to interact with a wide variety of people and information sources regarding this broad conception of sustainability. I asked each of the teens how they defined sustainability for themselves.

Kim, the most outspoken member of the group, jumped right into the interview enthusiastically with her response.

Sustainability! All organic food.... No, I’m just kidding. But organic foods is sustainable. I think equality is sustainable. There shouldn’t be racism and

discrimination, and I'm not just talking about Black and White, I'm talking about all different types of people. Being healthy, the way you live your life. Having healthy relationships with people. Like arguing with my mom, that wasn't sustainable at that point in my life. You know, no abusive relationships. Trying to be healthy. Drug use-that's not really sustainable. Try to do what you can. Cause I live at home now, and I try to recycle, but there's only so much I can do as one of 8 people in the house. So my sisters, they look at me like I'm crazy and they be throwing stuff away and I'm like "yo, put it in recycling" and they're like, "no, you do it" [laughs]. I was just throwing the food outside in the yard, cause it's biodegradable, it's food, so someone's gonna eat it or it's gonna break down. So I was just throwing it out in the yard, but you guys said I might get mice, so I need to figure out a composting thing.

From her expression, it was clear that this was a passionate and fun topic for Kim. She finds humor in the relationship with her siblings as she strives to engage in conscious practices regarding her resource usage. Her personal definition of sustainability includes environmentally conscious lifestyle choices, such as organic food consumption, recycling, and composting, in addition to social aspects such as having healthy relationships and equality for all people. For her, sustainability is not a limited concept as it includes social and environmental aspects. It has meaning for her in the context of her own life experiences and she applies it to a myriad of aspects of life.

Becky speaks of a similar definition for herself.

I guess I have a sustainable mind but not a sustainable lifestyle, which is, you know, recycling and stuff. I don't have all that. It's hard to change all of the sudden, plus my dad and brother.... The whole equality thing.... I definitely, definitely, definitely believe in that. So sustainability to me is equality. For me that's the main thing.

As Kim noted, living in a household with family members who are not concerned with recycling is challenging. Becky acknowledges that she has knowledge of this information and "a sustainable mind", but that changes of lifestyle habits take time to

implement. She further emphasizes the point that social equity is central to a true conception of sustainability. To her it is not something added on, it is a foundational characteristic of a sustainable paradigm.

Mark puts the concept in the context of history as the natural way many people have lived. He acknowledges that sustainability is a part of Indigenous lifeways stretching back many generations.

Sustainability would be the normal way of living. Sustainability was here before I was here, it was here before you was here. It was here before [Europeans] got to this country and took it from the Indians. It was here and it's always gonna be here no matter what. Once everybody figures out that's the main way of living, that's the main way it's supposed to be, then I think we'll see a lot of changes in this world.

For him, the way most people are living now is in contradiction to his conception of sustainability. As a dominant Western culture has influenced peoples' spiritual and material relationships to land and the natural world, an unsustainable way of life is normalized and practiced by many people. However, because it is "the main way it's supposed to be", and "was here and it's always gonna be here", sustainable examples can be drawn from a repository of Indigenous knowledge and tradition, affording the opportunity for people to transform society worldwide.

Nehanda sees these changes as a fresh start and an alternative to the way things are now in the modern world.

A new beginning.... A different way to live. It's better, it's the right way to live I'd say. There's too much technology today. It's good to a certain extent, but it's not....

Teens throughout the world, not only in industrialized countries, are utilizing technology as a major part of their life experience and communications mediation. Cell phones, text messaging, email, television, and online social networking (primarily MySpace and Facebook) are some of the main communications technologies Green Guerrillas use every day. Their experiences are shaped by the omnipresence of electronic media. Yet when Nehanda critically reflects on the state of the world today, she takes issue with the dominance of technology. She admits having mixed feelings about it. What this seemingly simple statement implies is an awareness of the negative effects on the environment and people's lives that a consumerist, technologically oriented society creates.

James sums his perspective up simply, drawing upon the wisdom of Indigenous worldviews.

Sustainability, I think, is using only what you need to use and saving resources for the next generations to come, the other ones that are coming after you, to keep it so that there's enough supply of resources to keep the earth how it is and not to destroy the planet.

It is interesting to see that James frames his interpretation of sustainability in the ideas of caretaking the earth for coming generations. This outlook is embedded in the culture of the Haudenosaunee, as reflected in the seventh generation philosophy. He notes the personal responsibility one has to those coming next in to the world and the imperative to not make decisions that will negatively affect them. After over a year in the program he identified with having Native ancestry on both sides of his family. Prior to his participation in the program, he had not been exposed to authentic Native culture. Feeling comfortable in claiming that part of his identity clearly had meaning

for him. An Indigenous outlook on sustainability resonates with him and is reflected in his answer to my question.

Green Whips, Green Cribs, Green Grownups

I also asked them to elaborate on what this idea of sustainability meant for how they live their lives now and how they will live them as adults. Nehanda states simply,

I'm definitely gonna have a house with a green yard and solar panels and stuff like that. It's just a better way to live. You guys taught me a lot of things and I'm still learning, too.

It is clear she values what she has been exposed to in the program and that she sees herself engaged in a lifelong learning process about sustainability. She articulates a desire to have her own home utilize renewable energy, as well as having an environmentally friendly yard.³⁵

James focuses on the personal choices he makes in regards to resource consumption and hopes to make in the future, in regards to a vehicle.

I'm gonna try and do what I can for my part in sustaining the planet. I recycle, turn off the lights when I'm not in the room, save the water and not keep it running, things like that. Don't drive a Hummer [laughs]. I'd like a hybrid Lamborghini.

³⁵ 30% of water used on the East Coast and 60% on the West Coast goes to watering lawns. 18% of municipal solid waste is composed of yard waste. The average suburban lawn receives 10 times as much chemical pesticide per acre as farmland. Per hour of operation, a gas-powered lawn mower emits significantly more pollution than the average automobile. See Bormann, Balmori & Geballe (1993) *Redesigning the American lawn: A search for environmental harmony*.

In addition to being conscious about everyday resource conservation, he points out one of the major ways people in an auto-centric country and society contribute to global carbon dioxide emissions. The Hummer is emblematic of an oil-driven culture that does not value efficiency nor conservation. The status symbol of a large SUV that has dismal fuel efficiency, and whose owner is very unlikely to ever need or use the supposed off-road capabilities of such a vehicle, illustrates the un-sustainability of an ego and profit driven consumerist paradigm. In the hip hop culture, which he and many of the other Green Guerrillas are a part of, Hummers, Cadillac Escalades, and other SUVs with flashy rims and expensive accessories have a ubiquitous presence in music videos that they are exposed to on a regular, if not daily, basis. The desire for a fast and sexy car is not, however, non-existent. Even though Lamborghini does not manufacture them presently, he articulates the desire for a hybrid version of one of their sports cars.

James's exposure to the story of the West Philadelphia High School Electric Vehicle team and the award-winning hybrid-biodiesel sports car they built gives him an example that shows his desire is not a far-fetched fantasy. When he joined the program, *Green Guerrillas v.1* had just come out, which featured a short segment about them made from pictures and information that were available on the internet. Later that school year we met and interviewed those students. Seeing the car in person and meeting a group of peers who were not only successful at creating a vehicle that the auto industry claimed could not be made, but were also all students of color, made a strong impression on all Green Guerrillas. It is almost inevitable that young people want to have a "cool" car, given the predominance of the automobile in material and popular culture. However, many young people are acknowledging that there is a problem with the status quo of low fuel economy at a time when concerns about

climate change, peak oil, and energy resource geo-politics is increasing. They are redefining “cool” for themselves as including more sustainable features, in addition to being fast and looking appealing. Kim also expresses a desire for an energy efficient lifestyle in regards to her residence and transportation.

It depends on how much money I have. It's so backwards, why do hybrids cost more? I guess it's cause they're hybrids, but then there used to be electric cars and they're not out there anymore. But I feel like...if people know that ...there's crazy global warming - why not sell hybrids and solar panels and things like that for lower prices? I would get a hybrid or a diesel so I can make it a veggie engine or run on biodiesel, something sustainable like that. I also want a dream house. You know the dream house with the white picket fence - that's the status quo. But if I was to get a house like that, I've already said I want solar panels. It would be one of those houses on the hill, but it would be solar energy...garden in the back...no pesticides though! That's my goal is to build my house like that.

Green Guerrillas have learned how homes are the other large personal contribution to one's carbon footprint. They have visited several local homes that incorporate sustainable designs and building practices, such as utilizing green and local supplies and renewable energy. In addition to wanting an alternative fueled vehicle, like a vegetable oil powered diesel, or at least a fuel efficient hybrid, Kim wants to have a “green” home. She clearly states she wants to build her own home that is powered by solar energy and have an organic garden. Being from a working-class background, she takes particular note of the financial aspects, pointing out that renewable energy technology is expensive. She wonders why, if there are major concerns about global climate change, are these technologies not being made more accessible and affordable for more people? From her participation in the program, she has become well informed on transportation issues related to fossil fuel consumption through a combination of research (e.g. viewing documentaries about peak oil and electric cars) and making media about alternatives.

Becky also focuses in on transportation and housing, taking in to account her financial situation.

In terms of how I live physically, I have been thinking, honestly, I don't want a car. I know I won't be able to afford one and if I could afford one, I'd definitely want something that I could convert and use veggie oil. I don't even know how far it runs, but a motorbike.... cause I know they have diesel motorbikes, I want one of those. A bicycle, [laughs]... I can't even ride uphill. I can't even go down hills because I have a phobia cause I got in to an accident when I was little, so yeah, no bikes. Bikes are for Ithaca [laughs] and China. I want something that can actually take me kind of far. I'm always willing to walk.

If I get my own place, it's a new start, I'll recycle, even if I can't compost, cause I doubt I'll have a backyard. I don't want to compost indoors.... If it doesn't stink, though, I'll think about it. I wish I could get a place where I could really, really modify it and use solar panels. That'll have to be in the future future [sic]. Becky in the near future, like 5 years from now, I'll aim to get my own place, a small place. If I'm looking for a roommate, I'll be like, "you have to be neat and sustainable. If you don't know the definition of that, you're not living with me" [laughs]. Seriously, I will do that.

Like Kim, she expresses a desire to have solar energy for her own home, but sees that as being many years away. As the oldest Green Guerrilla, and the closest to adulthood, she makes a realistic assessment of her transportation and housing options for her near future. Having her own place and a "new start" would allow her to be more conscious about recycling and she entertains the idea of doing her own composting. The concept of sustainability is clearly important to her, as she explains that it will be a character requirement for any potential roommates.

James articulates the importance of continued learning for him to be able to practice other aspects of an ecologically conscious life.

I think if I studied it more it would get me on a closer track to sustainable living. I don't know about the cabin in the woods, I could do the solar panels and stuff like that, but I don't know about the cabin. I plan on getting a hybrid car or biodiesel car so that's a definite, but my first car might not be cause I'm poor right now. When my record deal comes and all that, I'll get my biodiesel Hummer.

Having been raised primarily in an urban environment and feeling more comfortable in that kind of space, he does not see a log cabin in a rural area as being an attractive housing option, however he does acknowledge wanting to have solar power and other green building technologies that could be incorporated in to any home. Like the other Green Guerrillas, transportation is an important factor, and he, too, expresses a desire for a more “eco-friendly” form of mobility. Being a rapper fully invested in hip-hop culture, with aspirations of success and wealth in the music business, he describes his own dream vehicle, much like James. Though the original military Humvees are diesel-powered, no current production civilian Hummer SUVs are available with that option. However, that is not a limitation on the imagination of an artistic 16 year old. For Mark, being able to enjoy the typical material fruits of a successful career in hip hop in an environmentally conscious manner is appealing.

Healthy and Sustainable Food

Mark asked me at different times throughout his participation in the program, if certain things were sustainable in my estimation. I remember him asking me once, “Is Chinese food sustainable”? The questions that arose during our day-to-day activities often led in to long discussions and research sessions. Sometimes I would give them a quick answer, but more often, such instances were used as opportunities for deeper inquiry. The teens would simultaneously research information on the topic at hand and share what they had found. Exposure to new information led them to re-

think some of their lifestyle practices, particularly around eating fast food and drinking high fructose corn syrup-sweetened drinks. Mark shares how his perspective is starting to change and become more conscious in regards to food.

I take more consideration in it now. I don't do it purposely, I mean I still eat McDonalds once in a while, I still do that type thing, but I think about it more. Like I still eat McDonalds but I don't eat it as much as I used to. I think about different things, like where did this come from? Two, three months ago I just started reading labels on everything I eat now, just to see what is in what I'm eating.

Having a heightened awareness of healthy nutrition through his experiences with Green Guerrillas prompted Mark to cut back on his fast food consumption and regularly scrutinize the ingredient labels of other foods.

Che also shared his thoughts on environmental consciousness within the organization:

Organic snacks and drinks are available at the media center, providing a jumping off point for discussions on topics such as factory farming, monocropping versus mixed crop farming, sustainable practices, as well as food security, sovereignty, human and animal health, and biodiversity. Participants are encouraged to experiment with new foods and cuisines that might seem foreign or weird.

“Natural” and “organic” are terms which have a bum rep within certain communities. Ithaca, NY is notorious for being an out-of-touch-with-reality safe haven for hippie refugees from the 60s. The image associated with “organic” is often that of a 60-year-old Dead Head - long, unruly hair, questionable odor, generally un-cool, and undeniably White. Learning that one's grandmother's garden was very likely filled with organic vegetables is often dumbfounding for the participants.

Anecdotally, I witnessed interesting phenomena when the GGs went to pick organic strawberries. At first the youth participants could hardly recognize or acknowledge strawberries that didn't appear as a food stylist would present them. Our image of food is so badly warped in American society, that healthy,

ripe and delicious strawberries right off of the bush were deemed not good enough. The youth were also scared to eat them after picking them. Food that hasn't been sterilized, sanitized, packaged, and presented seems somehow unsafe. Yet after some coaxing, and after they observed the mentors eating strawberries, they tried them, and discovered that they were more flavorful and intense than any store-bought strawberry has ever been.

Having direct experiences with and discussions about organic agriculture as a regular part of the program has created a heightened awareness of the issue among the teen participants. They have learned to appreciate the value of it, both intellectually and personally. There is a consciousness about the threats to human and ecosystem health that non-organic and fast foods present. Though they may be a generation or two removed from direct first-hand experience with home gardening or agriculture in their families, several of them have learned to identify a historical personal connection to organic agriculture that helps to normalize it and make it seem less exotic. Through collaborative activities with Ithaca's Peoples Garden Project, which was featured in *Green Guerrillas v.2*, and a local foods initiative of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County, with which they made strawberry ice cream for a community block party, the value of local and organic food production is made tangible through hands-on experiences.

Throughout their responses, Green Guerrillas demonstrate a critical awareness of the intersection of environmental and social issues. Lifestyle choices related to food, transportation, and home energy are not just the purview of a Hollywood "eco-elite", but are directly relevant social and economic justice issues for this group. Equality, accessibility, healthy relationships, an outlook on the well-being of future generations, conscious decision-making, and a critical view of technology are all a part of our definition of sustainability.

Resource Consumption and Injustice

I also asked them how they thought issues of energy and resource consumption relate to issues of social and economic inequality. James focuses on the United States' imperialism and exploitation of other countries.

From what I've seen, the countries with the most resources are also the poorest countries and that's a problem, because that means we're taking their stuff and we're not even giving them equal money on that. That's not right. The US is making so much off of other countries, but yet the people in those countries that the US is taking from, can't even afford to feed their families. The US hires workers from those countries to get the resources out of the ground and pays them like 10 cents a day, that's not ok.

James sees a great injustice in the current economic practices in the world. Though some might argue that multi-national corporations are a more pervasive element than nation-states, he sees exploitation of people and resources as being associated with United States hegemony. Given the promotion and embrace of capitalism, corporatism, and neo-liberalism by the political and economic sectors of the United States, it is not surprising that he would perceive it this way. He articulates how entrenched this perspective is and how difficult it is to make changes for the better.

I don't think anything can be done until you go to the bigger person like the president, and he's not gonna change anything cause he wants money in his pocket. So I think you should do what you can do, but me personally, I don't think it will change anything cause you can't be the only one doing what you're supposed to do, you have to have everybody else. America's gonna keep buying and buying and buying and it's never gonna change as long as we keep buying. America's gonna keep taking from other countries.

Though he acknowledges the importance of individual choices, he sees the scope of the issue being much larger, requiring a larger scale collective action. He identifies

consumerist society as being integral to the exploitation of other people and places.

For James, educating people about what is behind the products they consume is crucially important.

You have to show people where the Nikes really come from, where the diamonds really come from, you have to show everybody all those things and then they'll understand, "I don't need Nikes that bad to the point that somebody has to die when they're making them" or "I don't need a diamond that bad that somebody has to risk their life." It can be done through the media, but I don't think they want to show people that side of it. If the president wanted people to know about those types of things he'd put it in the education system. Cause he did the No Child Left Behind Act, so he could do something like that.

Sweatshop labor and conflict diamonds are two issues that have been studied extensively by Green Guerrillas. Mainstream media is critically analyzed regularly, as well. He sees the media as being in collusion with the status quo. If this were an issue of importance, it would be dealt with as a part of public education. He knows the president can make executive orders that deal with that subject, as he is going to schools that are affected by George W. Bush's educational policies. James also identifies a major energy issue that has global connections.

I don't think we won't be relying on other countries for oil. I think we're gonna still need it unless we cut back on how much energy we use. Some people may be willing to stop driving Hummers, but not others. I think people care, but they still want to have a certain lifestyle cause they're used to it or they never had it. Like I'd love to drive a Hummer, but at the same time I wouldn't.

He brings up the symbol of the Hummer again and relates it to peoples' ethical choices based on either privilege or poverty, as he critically recognizes that, being from a working-class background, there is a part of him that desires to have a nice car.

However, he tempers that desire, because he knows that it is not an environmentally friendly mode of transportation. For him, the issue of peoples' choices, in regards to personal vehicles, affects the United States' reliance on other nations for oil.

Kim also brings up the issue of petroleum consumption, though she relates it to the environmental and social aspects of domestic extraction issues.

I was watching CNN the other day and everybody knows we're running out of oil, right? They were talking about [the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge] and trying to get more oil from there. There's a law that says we can't. So now they want to take the Native American's land and they're trying to dig up more oil. Do you not see? Oil has a big impact on the environment; I don't understand why you still want more oil.

She has had experience through the program with interviewing Indigenous people about environmental issues, including an Athabascan Dene chief from Alaska, and is well aware of the environmental problems associated with the oil industry, as well as Native sovereignty issues. For her, the magnitude of current environmental dilemmas creates a sense of anxiety.

I think we're all doomed. I'm waiting for 2012. I really am, just to see what's gonna happen, I guess. I'm kinda scared; it's a weird feeling. Cause like we're sitting here working and I'm going to school, I'm gonna be in college soon, but if in couple years, what if that's all gone? What if everything we're working for is all gone? But I'm not gonna sit here and be lazy. I feel really weird, but I just want to wait for 2012. Even though that's just a myth I guess?

Following her response, we got into a long discussion about the Mayan calendar, Native prophecies, natural disasters, and the doomsday phenomenon surrounding the winter solstice in 2012. She had seen a program on the History Channel about the subject and wanted to know my perspective on it as we had not discussed it before in

Green Guerrillas. Having recently seen the show myself and having done a little research on contemporary Mayan perspectives on the significance and meaning of the year 2012 according to their calendars, we had a lot to talk about. At this point in her life, with the decisions she was making about college and career, she felt anxiety about the possibility of cataclysmic upheavals in the environment and society due to humans not living sustainably. She was unsure of how to situate herself with this date looming only slightly more than four years away. However, she finds strength in what she has been learning in the program, even though it is tempered with knowing the challenges of getting more people to appreciate that outlook and taking concrete steps towards positive actions.

I've gained knowledge about sustainability, but I'm only one me. I can't even get everyone in my house to recycle. So I feel like I can't really do that much, but I guess internally I'll have a better understanding of what's going on.

Despite expressing a sense of relative powerlessness in regards to these issues, she articulates that her own knowledge and understanding can help her to navigate an uncertain future.

Environmental Justice – Making Connections

I also asked them about their thoughts on environmental justice. They have been exposed to a variety of information on the subject through the work they have done in the program. James sees the underlying issue as being one of power and wealth.

I think that a majority of the problems like pollution are where the poor people are at. Rich people don't live next to a polluted lake. Their water's fine, but poor people, their water's polluted. Most of these issues are in poor peoples' communities. I think people could do something to slow it down, but it would

take a lot of people. It would probably take more than just one community. Poor people, people of color, they'd all have to be fighting for the same thing.

He recognizes that stopping injustice, challenging the status quo dominance of the rich and powerful requires a commitment to unity so he sees strength in numbers with multiple communities working together. Through his participation in the program he has directly experienced the power that comes from working collectively. By learning about environmental justice struggles from the nearby Onondaga Nation's efforts to get Onondaga Lake cleaned up³⁶ to a myriad of environmental issues in the developing world, as a Green Guerrilla, James has had the opportunity to explore this subject in depth and is comfortable articulating his thoughts on it.

Kim frames her response to my question about environmental justice in the context of her own family due to their receiving public assistance.

I have an example, it's my own personal example, which isn't that bad, compared to other predicaments out there. Well, my mom, you know there's seven of us and then it's my mom - single parent, and she gets WIC, right? And so specifically on the WIC checks, which is obviously for someone in need, specifically on there it says you can't have organic milk, you can't have certain things. It kinda pissed me off.... That's just a prime example of how the government is supposedly trying to help, but you can't get organic milk. You know, they give you all the milk with the hormones and everything else in it, especially now when factory farms are outrageous, but they won't give you organic milk. As petty as it sounds.

³⁶ Having the distinction of being one of the most polluted lakes in North America, there are numerous studies on the ecology and chemistry of Onondaga Lake. For background on the land rights action of the Onondagas, who are seeking a comprehensive cleanup and remediation of the lake and other sites within their traditional territory that they assert was illegally acquired and occupied by the state of New York, see <http://www.onondaganation.org>. For the state's position on the cleanup efforts for Onondaga Lake see <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8668.html>. It should be noted that the Onondaga Nation has been excluded from the processes and entities, such as the Onondaga Lake Partnership, having to do with the lake's cleanup.

For her, the injustice of her mother being barred from getting organic milk through a social service program is an issue right in her own home. Knowing the health hazards and environmental problems associated with factory farming, she sees a major problem with the status quo and how it affects her family. This is a regular engagement with the state where poor people are dictated to and the unfairness of it upsets her. Family planning policies are often a major governmental intervention in the lives of the poor. Even though she recognizes that, relatively, the issue of organic milk access might not be the worst oppression people face, it is still, nonetheless, a case of environmental injustice when people cannot get healthy food. For her, it is an immediately tangible situation where the government and agri-business come together to accentuate class divisions and perpetuate non-organic farming, through subsidizing poor peoples' access to only a certain kind of milk. Kim also brought up issues of power and oppression that affect African people on the continent and in the diaspora.

Blood diamonds, like in Africa.... that's just wealthy people exploiting children and African people in general. That movie [*Blood Diamond* (2006)] was very touching. They make people go against themselves and that's a resource and a social issue. Rich people are trying to get diamonds, but they're making the African people over there argue amongst themselves, which is messing up the whole social thing, cause now we've got... just like here, Black on Black crime. Instead we should be going against the oppressor, which we don't really do, but they do that on purpose.

Like James, she sees the need for people to unite to resist injustice and oppression. Furthermore, she identifies the divide and conquer strategy used to keep people subjugated and how it plays out similarly on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. She goes on to discuss the dominance of prisons and the criminal justice system and their effect on the Black community and other communities of color.

They exploit people all different kinds of ways. You have the prison industrial complex. It's like this cycle. First off, you have a lot of poor people here. There's a lot of poor people everywhere. Although the poor people in the US may not be as poor as other people in other countries, but they're still poor, regardless. Because there's not enough resources for African-American and people of color, one of the things they do is sell drugs. Drugs are illegal and everyone knows that, but the laws seem like they're just put into place to tie people up. So you get a felony, right? You get locked. One thing that comes with that felony is you can't vote.

So now there's another person of color that can't vote, which also ties into the whole system because that's our system, we vote for our presidents. So I think the whole concept behind that is, if we just lock them all up or give them all felonies, a majority of them cannot vote. People of color have a huge population in prisons all across the United States. So that's another thing, if you're locked up and you can't vote, obviously a whole group of people aren't getting their voices heard. Also, they're in there working for like 2 cents a day making Victoria's Secret. That's really ridiculous. The 13th Amendment, that's also really ridiculous... It says basically, in my rephrased words, that you can't have slavery unless you're incarcerated. I think that's what the whole system, the whole government is trying to do, lock us all up, put us in jail and have us all work as slaves.

They target Black males, so Black males are all locked up; there's not any father figures around for people of color families. Their sons are most likely to follow their path cause they have no guidance, having that father figure in their life. The answer to everything is usually just to lock them up and throw away the key, even though people aren't getting to the problem, but the problem is caused by the same people locking you up, so they really don't care, is the way I see it.

There's not slavery any more, besides in prison, so yet there still is. They're trying to be sneaky about it; it's just another form. Not having enough to eat, not having this, not having that, it's a twisted system. I guess you could protest. Education is the first thing, that's what I always say. Even that's difficult. Everything's a challenge. If you've grown up thinking one thing your whole life.... you know, Christopher Columbus was a good person, if you're learning that, then obviously it must be true because you've been taught that your whole life, so if somebody tries to tell you different, it's like, are you sure? Do you know what you're talking about? That's why you need to educate people when they're young.

Kim's in-depth analysis of what is termed the prison-industrial complex posits incarceration as modern-day slavery.³⁷ She cites the United States Constitution as legalizing a system whereby inmates are made to do work for corporations for a few cents a day. The injustice of oppressive economic conditions leads to illegal activities that lead to imprisonment and the political disenfranchisement of the Black community. She sees that the government is not interested in solving the issues that create the drug economy, since they are directly implicated in creating the situation.³⁸ For her, critical education is a key component of liberating oneself from "a twisted system" where peoples needs go unmet; even though it is a challenging prospect given the mis-education people are receiving. She highlights the example of the mainstream conception of Columbus and the difficulty in changing one's perspective when they have been taught that he was a hero and "a good person" all their life. She uses this example to stress the importance of having a critical perspective at an early age.

Generational Environmental Outlook

Getting young people engaged with environmental issues is of crucial importance to all peoples of the world. It is especially imperative at a time when assimilation and ecological devastation threatens the continuity of Indigenous knowledge and cultures; global climate change threatens the well being of people and ecosystems in many different regions; and rampant neo-liberal economic globalization begets exploitation, poverty, and injustice. Through their involvement with Green Guerrillas, these teenagers have been exposed to a variety of critical perspectives on

³⁷ The 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution states, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime where of the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

³⁸ For a thorough examination of the government's role in flooding inner-city neighborhoods with crack cocaine, see Gary Webb's *Dark alliance: The CIA, the contras, and the crack cocaine explosion* (2003). For a perspective from the hip hop community, see the documentary film *Letter to the president* (2005).

environmental and social issues through research, discussion, and first-hand interviews with a diverse array of filmmakers, hip hop artists, activists, and Indigenous people. I asked them why they feel it is important for young people to be involved in environmental and social issues.

James draws his response again from the concepts of inter-generational responsibility when he reflects on the responsibility his generation will be taking as they come into adulthood.

Because we're the next generation. Y'all are leaving [laughs] and we're coming up. Right now y'all are in charge, but in a few years it's gonna be us, and it's gonna keep going like that, so you need to educate the young people on these kinds of situations and you need to let us be involved cause it's our life, too. It's not just your planet, know what I mean?

He stresses the importance of educating young people on the pressing environmental issues of today, as well as creating the spaces and opportunities for them to be involved in addressing these issues in a meaningful way. Recognizing the responsibility that his generation will have to take, as they become the leaders of tomorrow, James articulates the importance of inter-generational learning and organizing.

Becky echoes James's perspective, emphasizing the critical situation their generation has inherited.

We are dying - environmentally and socially. It needs to start with the young folks, so that if we practice this kind of thing as we grow up, we could teach the young folks behind us until the point where everyone is sustainable. You've got to teach people at an early age so they grow up knowing and learning that kind of thing. It's a process. That's why I think it's important so we can start to fix or improve what the heck is going on right now.

Given the pressing nature of environmental and social problems, she feels the education of young people towards this orientation is very important. Inter-generational learning is a process that holds the hope for a better future.

Media and Marketing to Teenagers

After discussing climate change and its affects on the Arctic, the war in Iraq, the national debt, and how she feels that President (at the time of the interview) George W. Bush is a “warlord” who is “setting the stage for dictatorship in this country”, Becky expounds on the role of the media’s negative influence on people, particularly female teenagers.

The US, all the media and stuff, it brainwashes people, until you’re nothing but a clone. A lot of people, especially teens, are like “I know what’s going on”. I say I know what’s going on, I believe in sustainability, but I am, in fact, affected by the media and the social problems of the society and the image that you’re supposed to have as a teenage girl. Which sucks, but that’s how it is. Like you’re a teenager, you’re supposed to be all confused, but now with all this stuff it’s ten times worse. Gotta be this thin and you need to eat McDonalds, all those commercials make you believe you’re gonna get thinner cause of the people in the commercials. And then you watch another commercial that tells you you’re fat, you get depressed and you eat more McDonalds. They’re working together; they’re making you fat and then buying the diet products which isn’t really working and you get depressed even more and you eat until you’re up to like two pizzas a day. Like the dude who weighs 4,000 pounds and he can’t get up and his skin is molding to the couch. I saw him on Maury.

Becky sees the extreme example of obesity that is highlighted on some television talk shows as the inevitable result of the confusing and conflicting messages and products that are a part of commercial advertising. She is acutely aware of the gender-specific

normalization of thinness being targeted towards young women like her that perpetuates unhealthy eating habits and mental well-being.

Kim also sees that consumer culture is particularly directed towards teenagers, who are an over \$100 billion global market.³⁹ Like Becky, she identifies this as having a direct negative impact on their age group.

I think we're always affected. I guess everyone is, but I think mainly they try to teach us young. For example, McDonalds. All teenagers, well not all, but usually most teenagers eat McDonalds. That's our health at stake. It tries to be attractive to young people, like kids with the Happy Meals with the toys. It seems like things like that try to attract us.

Also, being teenagers and driving, we want the hottest cars, we want the hottest things, but I doubt that they're sustainable, like Escalades, we always want that. We want the hottest gear, the flyest Jordan's, even though I sometimes wear Jordan's; I'm being a little hypocritical right now. I think we are targeted a lot. I'm only 16, so it's kinda hard for me to talk like this. I think right now if you tell me to do something, I'm more vulnerable. I feel like if we are aware now, it helps in the long run, I really do.

Given her age group's susceptibility to consumer marketing, since they are impressionable, "vulnerable" and quite literally "targeted", Kim recognizes the importance of environmental and social awareness for teenagers, even as she notes her own participation in consumer culture. This demonstrates a maturity of thought as she critically examines contradictions in her own life. She goes on to discuss the importance of critical education for adolescents.

This is the age where we're not children anymore, but were almost like into full adulthood, almost into college. School for instance, if we've been taught

³⁹ See *The \$100 billion allowance: accessing the global teen market* by Elissa Moses (2000) for an examination of how marketing research is conducted on teenagers.

something all our lives, even out of college, then I think it's not really too late, but it may be too late to tell me something like, "well have you ever heard of the Black Panthers and they did this"... you might not believe them. But now being a teenager, we're at this age, where maybe we'll stop and think about it instead of going your whole life thinking one thing. Why not just go half your life thinking one thing and then learn something new?

For her, the earlier one can learn new ideas and counter-narratives, such as the history of the Black Panther Party, the better. Though she remains hopeful that anyone can learn something that may contradict the status quo of what they have been taught through school and society, as adolescents, she feels they may be more open to such information.

The ease at which they responded to my question demonstrated that they were clear about the importance of their generation's participation in solving environmental and social problems. They are redefining these issues and their related terms, making connections between diverse perspectives and ideas. Being engaged in the inter-generational social learning environment of Green Guerrillas has given them a first-hand perspective interacting with a variety of people from their peers to the adult volunteers, who are of their parents' generation, to elders from various communities. As Kim and Becky demonstrate, they have an awareness of how media and marketing is targeted at them, encouraging them to participate in unsustainable aspects of the economy, such as fast food, which the production of threatens ecosystems and peoples' health, and sweatshop-produced apparel, which exploits peoples' labor.

Perspectives on School

To gain an understanding of how they felt about learning and education, I asked them about their experiences with formal schooling. All of them expressed

displeasure with their school environments and experience. James brings up the issues of unequal power dynamics and racism.

I can tolerate it. I don't really like it that much. It's not enjoyable. I don't like the teachers that much...they have too much power and it bothers me. Not all teachers, some teachers abuse their power and it bothers me. I don't wanna be there in the first place and then they make it so I don't wanna be there even more.

I was suspended a lot.... I think it was partly because of my skin color because other kids would do the same thing or worse and they wouldn't get suspended nearly as long as I would. I got suspended for a year only two weeks into my sophomore year.

I used to like school until I got suspended cause then it just feels weird coming back to all the students...I wasn't there for a year then I gotta come back and see everyone again and that's different. I changed from up there so I wouldn't get suspended. I didn't get suspended all year, but now my grades are low. I think it's like, I'm getting tired of school. We don't have any real decisions, we have to do whatever they say, if we don't then we're gonna fail.

James is a very intelligent young man who used to be a straight A student. His experiences with getting suspended for long periods of time, which he feels is directly attributable to his not being White, has changed him from someone who "used to like school" to someone who is "getting tired of school". The power dynamic between teacher and student is also an area where he sees abuse that leads to him having a negative attitude towards school.

Kim also had negative experiences in high school, which she attributes to the attitudes of the teachers and the superintendent of the Ithaca City School District, who has been heavily criticized for her handling of incidents of racism and discrimination.

Well I did go to the high school.... Judith Pastel I can't stand her. I don't like her values. School for me at the high school...it was ok, but it wasn't.... First

of all, the teachers aren't really there for you.... I just didn't like the whole vibe from the teachers. It was weird; there was a lot of racism going on. And it's funny; I've never been called out my name. People aren't really racist to me at that school, but they would be racist to my friends, so it'd make me feel weird. I'm not gonna be your friend, even though you didn't say anything to me. It's crazy, cause it'd be like us black people sitting together, but they would never say nothing to the people in camouflage sitting together.

[The school] where I'm at now, it's better. The classes are smaller and the teachers really, really care and pay attention to you. They try not to be biased. There's a whole bunch of different people there. There's poor people, rich people, White, Black, Asian. So it's a lot better out there, cause they try to work with you and help you. My English teacher, I think that's the one I connect with most. She's always trying to help me with writing and everything. She actually just gave me a call this summer. We're supposed to meet up so we can actually work together. But if I was going to the high school I don't think anyone would call me. [Laughs].

I didn't really talk about college back then [at Ithaca High School]. I don't know why that is.... I feel motivated- I feel like I can go to college. Before I was skipping school. It's not all the school; I was doing bad things myself. I wasn't going to classes and things like that but this is after the fact that I still wasn't getting the support I needed. I feel like I'm more capable of going. I feel my grades have improved and everything. It could be many different reasons. I feel more comfortable at [the school I'm at] now.

Kim attributes a lack of support from school in her decisions to both skip classes and change schools. She has found a more supportive atmosphere at another school and has flourished academically there. Going to college is very important to her and she feels like it is an achievable goal.

For Becky, the approach to learning in her schooling experience has not resonated with her at all. She does not feel capable or competent in learning academic subjects and expresses her frustration with the situation.

I hate it. That's it, I hate it. It just doesn't click with me at all. I mean, I like art classes...PE⁴⁰...that's it. It's probably not that I don't like school, well, yes I do dislike school, but it's more like there's something up with my brain and it just doesn't compute. If I'm not interested in something I won't do it. I guess I'm stubborn, but at the same time it isn't clicking and I don't feel like I need whatever I'm being...taught.... That's the problem. But I have to do it for the good job type of thing. Honestly I don't want to wash dishes. It's a crappy job. I don't even like to wash my own dishes. It's gross. So I need to find some kind of special talent, like I could sing or act or something, I would go for that, cause I like any form of art, and that kind of thing, you could just do it. If you're good at it, you could just do it and then you're set.

Despite her difficulties with it, she understands that education is necessary for her to not end up stuck in a dead-end, low-paying job. She wishes to find an artistic talent that she could build a career on, since she has had such a hard time with formal schooling. In the program she had demonstrated a tremendous aptitude for learning software and doing graphic design, so it was clear she was talented. However, what she was lacking most was a sense of confidence.

Mark critiques the educational system as being unsustainable on multiple levels – socially and environmentally. Like Becky, he had had many negative experiences with schooling that shape his outlook.

On one half cause all the electricity and gas and stuff that it uses [to power the school] on the other half it's not sustainable cause of all the racism, all the inequity and all that stuff. But that's not just that school, almost every school you go to- it's there. So that's something that us as a nation, us as a people gotta try and fix and work on. You can't stop somebody from being racist. But you gotta let them understand that, alright, what you do in your personal life I can't do nothing about that. If you wanna go home and say you don't like Black people or you don't like Asian people that's your business, but when you're in public places like the school where I gotta see you 5 days a week that's stuff you can just throw out the window for six hours. I'm here to get my education, you're here to get yours so you might as well leave that alone cause all its gonna do is cause more problems and it's not really worth it. And

⁴⁰ Physical education

you understand when you go to school it's not supposed to be like ok that's a White kid, that's a Black kid, that's an Asian kid. Nah, it's supposed to be they're all students; they're all here to get the same thing. That's how it should be, but it's not.

A lot of kids [of color] that don't do what they're supposed to, like skip class or that don't go to school or gets in trouble over some real stupid stuff. Most of the time it's cause, like, ya na mean, I'ma get in trouble anyways for something I didn't do. If I'm going to get in trouble I'd rather get into trouble for something I did. Or there's the fact, they don't give a fuck anyways, so why should I? Like you put that influence on them that you don't care about them being there, you don't care about what they do. If you don't care and you're supposed to be teaching me, how am I supposed to learn if you don't care if I learn or not. What's the fuckin' point of me coming in the first place?

Racism has figured prominently into his school experiences. He knows that school should be an environment where discrimination and inequities are not tolerated, but he does not see that happen in practice. Additionally, he identifies discrimination from teachers and administrators as setting up negative attitudes towards school on the part of students of color.

Critical Multicultural Learning Environment

Green Guerrillas is a unique learning environment. It is a collective organization working in a “youthtopian” space that functions as an extended family for everyone involved. There is a mix of hands-on instruction in digital media production, critical media analysis/political education through watching a great diversity of movies, as well as experiential learning focused on organic agriculture and renewable energy. A holistic-critical paradigm under girds all the activities and discussions. I wanted to know what the teen participants thought about both the variety of activities and the activities themselves. I also wanted to know how they compared that to school. They all agreed that they did not find some of the documentaries very engaging and that they found it hard to be patient with long video

shoots that sometimes took place. However, they also stated that they found the majority of the program activities to be fun, interesting, engaging, and actively broadening their awareness. James expresses his enthusiasm for the diversity of experiences, ideas, and information he is exposed to through his involvement in the program.

That's what made it interesting. Other jobs you just do one thing every day. Here it's different every day. I liked the Philly trip. I liked Odunde. It was a whole bunch of people there having fun. I've never been to an African-American festival or a Native American powwow. I've never been to anything that was racial. I like going on the field trips that are just around here. When we made ice cream - that was cool.

I liked the movie days. You just watch it and talk about it. It was about real issues, not some fake action stuff. [At school] they'll address it, they'll say something about it, but you won't learn about it in-depth or barely at all. And if you do learn about it, it's not the way you learn about it here. At school I learned the Black Panthers was the reverse KKK.

Here, we learn things, we watch movies that teach us things, we do hands-on things. School-we just read and they talk and that's boring. In school we only learn one side of the story. Here we learn everybody's stuff - the Black Panthers, Black history - that's great. I don't learn that much about Black history in school. Native American history, we don't learn that in school. The only thing we learn about in school is them finding America. And they ain't even find it. People were already here.

The dominance of mainstream narratives in school that serve to maintain the status quo is something he contrasts with the information he learns in the program through watching historical documentaries about social movements such as the Black Panthers. His experience is that even when certain topics are addressed in school, he feels they do not give a complete story. He became especially interested in the Black Panthers once he found out more about them that was in direct contrast to what he had been taught in school. He learned about their community service programs and their

attempts to uplift the black community nationwide, challenging racism and oppression, which was very empowering and inspiring to him. He also identifies the importance of having a variety of learning experiences, from multi-media interaction, to experiential activities. He contrasts that to school where he feels he is lectured to.

Kim also sees the diversity of activities and their content to be a positive attribute of Green Guerrillas.

It's like you get a little bit of everything. So you learn how to edit, but it's not focused on one thing. Usually a job would be just focused on one thing. I think it's kinda cool to be active in different ways. So we're editing one day, then the next day, I don't know, I'm speaking about Green Guerrillas.... we're making movies. I just like the variety, I guess. We don't just make movies, we learn things. I just like how we do everything. We do a lot. I like political education. That's great.

The educational component and the variety of activities make for a learning environment that she feels engaged with. Like James, she finds the political education to be crucially important to her development, due to the lack of complete information on the subject in school.

I'd rather have two stories than just have one and then I can figure out what makes the most sense and what is right and what isn't right. Cause throughout the whole school system they only teach you certain things and they teach you what's so-called supposed to be the right thing. I think the Black Panthers was mentioned once, but I don't think she even did it really thorough. And I should know the Black Panthers, but I didn't really know much about them until I got here, which is kind of twisted. In school you only learn half the story, so I guess this is my way.... well, I wasn't even curious, before I got here, about the other half of the story. Being here, we do do [sic] the other story.... That's why I think learning is very important just so I can decide the truth. You don't want to be out in the world talking about something and not know the full story. It's good to be well rounded. I'm talking in very general terms right now. I love to debate, first of all, so for me to debate with somebody, I have to know what I'm talking about.

Gaining knowledge through learning and listening figure prominently in to her assessment. She is very vocal and likes to share her opinions and debate people. Like James, she sees the story of the Black Panthers as being very important and relevant to her as a Black person, so having a more complete understanding, rather than a biased, status quo perspective, means a lot to her. She values that, in Green Guerrillas, “we do do the other story”. Engaging suppressed sub-altern counter-narratives gives her the information she feels she needs to decide what is true.

Having the opportunity to interact directly with a variety of people through the process of videotaping interviews gives Kim the chance to hear more of these counter-narratives first-hand, which she values.

Meeting with MOVE was nice in Philly.... That was cool doing the interview. I got to work the camera that day. That was nice. I had just seen the clips [referring to documentary footage of MOVE]. I met the people in the clips. They made a big impact in Philadelphia, so there’s somebody well known, and you got to hear [Mike Africa] talking about how his father and mother are still in prison. So you hear things about that all the time, but that was a primary source. He was saying, “I was born in prison”. I liked the message they gave about life, basically how we should care about life. It’s everything-it’s the plants around us, our surroundings. So it’s a great message.

Meeting members of a revolutionary religious organization who have been persecuted for their activism and lifestyle in support of sustainability was profound for her. Not only did she get experience with the technical skill of camera work and the intellectual skill of conducting an interview, she was exposed to a philosophy that resonated with her. Similarly to James, she finds the pedagogy of Green Guerrillas to be more appealing than that which she is exposed to in formal schooling.

It is like school, except that we’re learning visually more. We do read stuff, too, but we have movies on top of that, which makes it not so boring, if you

know what I mean. We're not just sitting there while you're writing on some board. We read different articles. And that's another thing, we're not reading it from textbooks, but, that's a good point, cause the stuff that we're learning about down here at the job, it isn't going to be in the textbooks. So we read newspaper articles.... I like using the internet to look up things.... and I like the movies. At school we use textbooks, we take notes while he writes on the board, which is pretty boring. And they're different materials we're learning. It's sorta like contradicting [each other] sometimes. And I think it's up to us to figure out the truth, but I'm pretty sure I know which one tells me the truth or not. There's always a twist or something's forgotten in school when we're learning things. I take what I learn from here and I go to school and try to, I don't know [Laughs]. I'll be like did "blah, blah, blah and such and such happen?" They get mad, they usually tell me something different or get mad. Why are you getting mad? I'm just asking you for the other side of the story [Laughs].

The diversity of learning mediums Green Guerrillas engage in is valuable to her. She expresses again the importance of getting new perspectives and learning to critically engage them to find out what the truth is. She notes that what she learns in the program and what she learns at school can be at odds with each other, but she expresses confidence in her ability to figure out competing claims, while taking pleasure in her ability to challenge what is being taught in the classroom. Moving forward in her education is important to Kim.

I like the fact that school is important here. Any other job they really wouldn't care. Especially at McDonalds. I like how we meet people; it's sorta like networking. Not really on purpose. It just happens, you guys let us meet your friends. I like the conferences we go to in Poughkeepsie. I like meeting other people my age, my peers from other places who are doing the same thing, trying to be sustainable or work around the same issues.

Engaging in interactions intra-generationally with her peers and inter-generationally with associates and friends of the adult volunteers is very valuable to her. She draws inspiration from other teenagers who are working on sustainability and social justice issues.

Though she is not nearly as comfortable expressing herself publicly as Kim, Becky also emphasizes the importance of outreach as part of the educational aspect of the program. Discussions within the collective, where she feels more comfortable, also figure prominently in her assessment of learning within the program.

[W]e learn things and also we touch other people as we learn, you know? So it's a win-win type of thing and I think it's interesting.... That one time when we just sat here in a circle and chatted for, like, forever, about random things like global warming, that was cool. I liked that we like to talk. Well for me not in public, but just talking to each other in general.

One of the key aspects of social learning is sharing knowledge within a social group and with the larger community. Becky sees value in that dynamic process as it relates to Green Guerrillas' engagement with the larger society through presentations, film showings and community meetings and events, in addition to the work that is done internally. The close personal nature of an experiential learning environment is also important to her.

It's different because it's a smaller group of people. It's a lot more open.... You learn more at this. Since we do media stuff, of course that's hands-on. You use the computer, the camera, the boom mic. You learn as you do whatever.

Compared to school, she finds the small size and openness to be beneficial to her learning process. She also identifies the experiential media production work as being a way to learn by doing. It is important to note that of all the teens, she is the least engaged with school and the general concept of learning, so her recognition of the value in the program's pedagogical approach is significant.

Mark expresses that learning is important to his life, though he finds that the pedagogies used in his experience of schooling have not resonated with him.

Well I know learning – you learn everyday no matter what you do. If you're in school or not in school you learn something every day. I don't mind learning- it's the way of how. I don't like sitting there for a whole 6 hour day just listening to certain teachers speak for 45 minutes and give you a packet and tell you to do this for homework. I like interaction. I learn when I'm interacting, not just taking notes. If you have me do stuff it will click better with me. So it's not that I don't like learning, it depends on how you teaching, as to if I'm gonna learn it or not. Cause I love learning new stuff everyday cause that's more stuff I can put in my rhymes in different ways, that's why I like learning different things – it gives me broader topics, different subjects.

For him, the incentive for gaining knowledge is that it helps him be a better rapper by having greater depth and versatility with the topics of his rhymes. However, he has found that the educational practices he has encountered in school are not interactive enough for him. He compares them to the pedagogical practices of Green Guerrillas.

It's hands-on. Most of the time, what I like is that when we ask how to do something, first they'll make us do it ourselves and try to figure it out ourselves before you'll just come over there and just tell us how to do it. Cause that's better for us, so if we gotta sit there and figure out how to do it ourselves, instead of somebody coming and helping every time we don't know how to do something. They explain things in different ways. A couple times when I didn't understand stuff in school and I came here to get help and they explained it to me differently and I understood it. I think Green Guerrillas should be my school. That'd be a good school.

Like Becky, the experiential nature of the work environment, he feels, is conducive to his learning. Being given the space and autonomy to figure out certain skills gave him confidence in his own ability to utilize complex, industry-standard, professional multimedia software, which he was extremely adept at learning. Exploring different ways of approaching knowledge is also important for him. He found that when he was

having difficulty understanding material in school homework, he could work with the adult mentors and get different ways of looking at the issue that would be understandable to him. He was so favorable about the learning environment at Green Guerrillas, that he expresses the desire for it to be his primary learning environment instead of his regular school. Mark also finds it to be beneficial for developing his critical thinking skills, as well as helping him identify career and educational goals.

I don't think I could've learned it more easier any other place. It was good learning in here because now I have another view. I still want to go to school for recording...most of the schools that have recording also have film, so I'm thinking, I know a lot about filmmaking and editing already so it'd be good for me to continue it in college if I make it there. It was fun learning it and it got me to understand it better.

He feels his experiences with the program have given him video production skills that compliment his interest in audio engineering, so it is something he wants to continue to study. He alludes to the fact that he may not make it through high school and therefore not get to college. He has had many negative experiences with school, which he brought up at several points throughout the interview.

A key aspect of the program for all of Green Guerrillas is being exposed to perspectives that they do not learn about in school. Che explains that,

For most of the participants, a particular set of worldviews have been presented. As we examine and critique and challenge these paradigms, we look at different knowledge sets, different cultural practices, and different ways of being. We also look at history through multiple lenses. Within the public school system, there is a fairly rigid tale of American history which kids are forced to memorize for tests. It's a history that chumps and often simply omits the global and local contributions of people of color.

Having access to “another view” or different perspectives is an integral part of Green Guerrillas paradigm. Nehanda expresses that while she liked everything about the program, most of all she, “really liked going places and interviewing the people and getting their experiences. Getting their point of view and where they’re coming from”. The exposure to a diversity of ideas is something they all value highly as they feel they are being denied a full perspective about the world by the limitations of a schooling paradigm that is shaped by a legacy of oppressions and misinformation, which make up the social and historical backdrop of their educational experiences.

Many of the teens who have been in the program, not just the ones who were interviewed, have expressed how important it was for them to be exposed to histories and viewpoints that challenged dominant mainstream narratives about subjects as varied as education, food, prisons, climate change, the Black Panther Party, the American Indian Movement, the Zapatistas, and other liberation movements.

Ithaca High School Walkout

Green Guerrillas v.2 featured a segment on the Kearney case⁴¹ and the issue of racism in the local schools. James and Mark spoke extensively about their participation in a school walkout on October 10, 2007 protesting inequities within the Ithaca City School District (ICSD). Green Guerrillas decided to take direct action on an issue that was important to them completely on their own initiative. It was a defining moment for them. They had attended and documented several school board and community meetings about equity issues in the district.

⁴¹ Amelia Kerney, a student at Ithaca College at the time, filed a successful human rights discrimination complaint against the ICSD due to inaction on the part of school officials in dealing with racist attacks her daughter suffered over several months while riding the school bus. For coverage of the story, including case documents, see the *Ithaca Journal* webpage “Human Rights Challenge” (URL in references).

The ICSD School Board had decided to challenge the jurisdiction of the New York State Human Rights Commission to hear the Kearney case and lost. The decision was appealed and the ICSD School Board was granted an injunction to halt the New York State Human Rights Commission hearing that had been scheduled for October 1, 2007. October 1 was also the “National Day in Solidarity With the Jena 6”, so a rally was held in front of the ICSD administrative building to call attention to local problems with racism in the schools and tie them to the situation in Jena, Louisiana. A few high school students joined the protesters, who were a mix of parents, community members, and college students. They demanded a meeting with the superintendent, Judith Pastel. Her secretary refused to do so and called the police. Eventually Pastel agreed to meet outside the building with the group. She spoke to the crowd and in the midst of a dialogue between herself and a high school student she stated she would not speak any more. She abruptly turned around and went inside the district office building and had the police lock the door. The majority of people present took this behavior as yet one more example of the district’s unwillingness to effectively address the issue. She had used the police to shield herself from the basic inquiries of concerned people in the community.

The issue was coming to a head when a very significant number of students and community members turned out for the next school board meeting on October 9, 2007. Many people signed in to speak during the open floor part of the meeting. Nehanda and Kim prepared a joint statement decrying the district’s failure to provide a safe and equitable learning environment for students of color and delivered it to rounding applause. Many others got up and spoke about the persistent nature of these problems in the schools. Long time residents of the community pointed out several

historical incidents in which students of color were penalized unfairly and not protected from racist incidents and violence.

James and Mark shared with me the story of what happened with the student walkout from their perspectives.

Mark:

We went to the board meeting the night before we walked out. Different peoples was talking about their experiences and problems they were having with the school and the whole thing about the Amelia Kearney case had come up. One person on the board, I don't remember his name, he thought they should suspend the appeal on the hearing or whatever and then all the people on the board started acting crazy – oh we can't do that, cause of this and cause of that, this that and the third, blah, blah, blah, so everyone was getting upset. They called for a five-minute recess; it ended up being like 20 minutes. Came back, and they're trying to move on with the procedure and we were like, oh hell no it's not working like that, so everybody get tight, like yo, how you gonna keep it moving, we trying to get this settled right now and they got up and left. We talked to them and they got up and walked out.

So I was heated, my man James he was tight, too, so I'm like, we need to do something tomorrow. He was like-whatchu saying? I was like we should do a walkout. He was like, yeah walkout sounds good. So it was like 11:30 at night, we callin peoples cellphones like, "we walkin out tomorrow, be at the front of the building". Got there, it was 7 people standing outside. I was like, this is gonna be the worst walkout in the history of walkouts. So the bell rang, we was all standing out there, a couple other people came. So they were like, so what are we gonna do? I was like I dunno but we might as well start. So we went through the building at first, saying "no justice, no peace". Went to the board building, stood out there. I spit;⁴² I did a little speech.... We went back around to Activities - it was like a whole nother 30 people over there. I'm like, ok this is what it is. We're still marching, I'm like why's nobody else coming out? Cause I got people texting me they're coming and I don't see them, Next thing I know everybody texted me back – yo they got us on lockdown, they won't let us out the room, they won't let nobody in the building. I'm like word? They got the whole school on lockdown talking about there's a threat walking around the school so that even made us tighter.

⁴² "Spitting" is slang for rapping.

James:

They had called the police. I think it was when we said “Walkout”. We chanted or something, you know, and they called the police. They told us we needed to go inside and then they just locked down the school. After we went in the building, they told us, when we were yelling in the hallway, they told us to get out and nobody did, so they called the cops and that’s when they locked down the school.

Every body came outside after they sent out [Assistant Superintendent Leslie Myers]... she’s Black. They sent her outside to talk to us.

Mark:

Kim was like, if y’all wanna talk to us, you gotta talk to all of us, so you gotta uplift the lockdown and let everybody who wanna be out here, be out here. So they had us write a list of names and they went and got the people, went into Activities, we sat down, we had a meeting. I don’t know if they lifted the lockdown, but they let everyone on the list come. Everybody sat in there going back and forth about things they’ve been through. Mr. Wilson⁴³ said he was going to come to the meeting in like five minutes. An hour into the meeting, Ms. Meyers actually had to get up and go get him, to come to the meeting.

James:

I thought it was good, everybody⁴⁴ could hear what we had to say. I don’t know if the principal was listening. He didn’t look like he was really paying attention.

Mark:

This one incident happened in there, when one of my friends...he got suspended for twenty two days because he had got in this fight with this White boy, this White boy called him the n-word. So Mr. Wilson sat there and said that never happened. So he went and got the boy that he was in the altercation with, he came in there and said in front of everyone in the room, that he did say what he said he said, and that he didn’t get suspended at all. Later on Mr. Wilson went to the paper and said that that didn’t even happen in the meeting. So I was like wow, he’s just pissing me off.

By the end, a parent in the audience asked if we could have a forum for the whole school, the district, everybody to be there, community members, to have a forum in seven days and he said yeah. So we started a protest countdown to

⁴³ The principal of Ithaca High School.

⁴⁴ News about the walkout spread quickly. Parents, community activists, and youth workers from the local community centers converged on the high school and were present at the meeting held in the Activities room.

equality thing flyer. The countdown thing was like a movie reel type; they said that it looked like crosshairs so they thought it was supposed to be something violent.

There was altercations throughout the whole week about different things.... they said we couldn't make copies of them in the school but we had a couple teachers on the inside that was helping us get flyers done. They said Mr. Wilson wasn't approving the flyers so we couldn't hand them out. But in the handbook, it says we're not allowed to post stuff without the principal's signature on it. But we wasn't posting nothing on the walls, we was handing them out to people, so we're like, we're good. They said we weren't supposed to do it, but we did it anyways.

One time I got into an altercation walking with my friend⁴⁵ to Mr. Wilson's office to talk about the noose problem. The White boys said they was gonna bring nooses to the school, hang nooses out. On my way there, these White boys in the hallway was acting mad ignorant, so we were like, what's y'all's problem, why you gotta be so ignorant. It was two of them. I turn around there's 15 more of them all dressed camouflage, they dropped they bags, so I'm like, oh it looks like I'm about to bang out right now and then I thought about it and was like nah it's not worth it, so I grabbed my two friends and was like come on let's go. Mr. Wilson showed up, told them to go to class, but they stood outside next two periods right outside the window of his office talking to police officers.

James:

Everybody was talking about bringing guns to school on the last day- the camo boys. They're the ones who wear camo and confederate flags to school. I know some of them and they're cool with me, they don't have problems with black people or any other race they just wear what they wear and do what they do. Like they go hunting in the woods... that's cool, but other ones are straight-up racists and act stupid. They were hanging nooses.

Mark:

The countdown ended on Friday cause that was the 7th day, the forum was supposed to happen on Friday. He [Principal Wilson] made Thursday and Friday optional to come to school cause peoples was talking about that there was threats going around the school saying that we was gonna start shooting people at the end of the countdown and the White boys had a hit list on us and we had a hit list on them.

⁴⁵ The same one who had been called the n-word and whose excessive disciplining was denied by Principal Wilson.

James:

[The administration] really didn't care about what we had to say. If they're gonna let everybody not go to school the day of our forum that shows that they don't have any care towards our situation.

Mark:

And then most of the people didn't come to school on Thursday and they had two separate forums at the same time. Pretty much one forum for the Black people and one for the Caucasian kids, which made no sense, so I got tight. I'm not participating in this at all. We had wrote a statement, here at Green Guerrillas, about the demands that we wanted, we had a couple of copies of the letter so some people went to one forum and some to the other and we read our letter, saying this was not what we asked for and we just left.

James:

We wrote a whole bunch of stuff about what was going on and why it was happening to present to the people that went to the GIAC⁴⁶ and Southside meetings, as well as organizing what we were gonna do next. It was new, but it was pretty cool.

Mark also talked about his involvement in a play called Voices Suspended that dramatized real incidents the teen actors had been through in school:

Ms. Cynthia Henderson,⁴⁷ she had talked about it at one of the GIAC meetings after the protest. We we're having different meetings and she had brought it up there. So they started working on it and they said it was going to be a mixture of acting and rapping so I'm like rapping, I'm in there, say no more. We started doing that; it was a long process, a very long process, stressful process. But I think it was good cause it was another way for us to get our word out cause it proves to us we done tried to get our word out twice without using no type of violence.... I think it was good that we can show that we got our voice and we don't need to go banging down doors and breaking windows for y'all to listen to us. We don't need to do that; we're more mature than that. I think it opened a lot of the teachers' eyes when we did it at the school. And a lot of the college kids that's up on the hill also that didn't know about what was exactly going on.

⁴⁶ Greater Ithaca Activities Center. GIAC and the Southside Community Center are places utilized by Ithaca's communities of color for recreation and other social activities.

⁴⁷ A theatre professor at Ithaca College.

Voices Suspended was performed at the Martin Luther King Jr. Day breakfast event at GIAC, Ithaca College as part of its commemorative activities for that holiday, a teacher in-service for the district, and the Kitchen Theater. I asked Mark what he thought when Principal Wilson, who he plays mockingly in one part of the piece and to whom he voices most of his anger and displeasure in other parts, showed up at the Ithaca College performance.

It was funny. It was fun. At first I didn't know he was there until like halfway through the play when I was playing him I saw him. That's when I realized he was there, when I was actually playing him. So I was like, he's here; I'm about to do me. We did the play and actually MC Lyte⁴⁸ brung it up that we're doing this play and how do we feel he's here? So I put him on blast. Told them Mr. Wilson's a fraud, a fake, he's gonna do whatever he needs to do to make people think he cares or he's gonna do the right thing. I don't believe this man, he done contradicted himself more times than I can count, so I'm not gonna sit here and believe him cause he went up there and said his little speech. I thought it was funny. I just laughed at him.

This was an opportunity for a student who felt powerless against the administration of his school to put the spotlight on them, in front of an audience and in front of some of the administrators themselves. After witnessing Principal Wilson's behavior during the time immediately following the walkout, especially what he felt were his blatant lies and misrepresentations to the local media, it was a chance for Mark to make his voice heard about what was going on at the school. Having their voices heard by the local and other communities was an essential goal of the students' walkout, their attempts at having a community forum about educational equity, and the production of the play.

⁴⁸ A noted hip-hop artist who gave the keynote speech that day.

Kim reflects on what the whole situation means to her. Even though she was no longer at Ithaca High School at the time of the walkout, she skipped school along with Nehanda to support the other Green Guerrillas who were students there. She also played a very active role in school board and community meetings around the issue of equity in the Ithaca City School District.

I feel that the walkout and all the commotion in October of 2007 had a great impact on me mentally. From the way the situation was handled to how it was provoked has changed my perspective. It wasn't a surprise to see the way the school administration reacted to the issues that were brought up by us, the teens. It was rather frustrating, having Mrs. Pastel walk away from a crowd that was expressing their concerns to Mr. Wilson who told two different stories to us, then the Ithaca Journal just caused a lot of stress. The month of October had become very hectic and even in school I began to slip. I now, as a junior, have a half credit in one of my classes because the school administration refused to handle our concerns for equality like professionals. Life should be sustainable and you shouldn't have to not achieve because of [an issue] that can be dealt with.

Even though it was not a surprise to her that the high school nor district administrators were not hearing their voices as students, it was still disconcerting to see how readily their concerns were dismissed or misrepresented to the media⁴⁹. She directly attributes her having some academic issues with the recalcitrance of school officials in dealing constructively and effectively with the issue of equity. She alludes to the situation being unsustainable, as it was preventable, had a negative impact on her educational experience, and represented a perpetuation of white supremacy, a form of social pollution that Green Guerrillas identify as being connected to, and just as problematic, as environmental pollution.

⁴⁹ There were several incidents that I was aware of where Principal Wilson would say one thing in a meeting with students and community members, but then apparently tell news reporters something completely different. When the inconsistencies were brought up in another meeting he would deny that he had said what everyone present had remembered him saying before he talked to the media.

The walkout was such a defining moment for these young people because they were able to take the knowledge they had developed in the program through the study and analysis of liberation movements, articulate their viewpoints and concerns through public speaking and media production, and decide on their own, with no adult input, that organizing to take direct action for change in a space, which to many of them is oppressive and authoritarian, was the right tactic for them. Many long-time residents of Ithaca expressed to us how glad they were to see the equity issues being brought to such public attention after over two decades of problems in the ICSD, during which time there were many visits by the United States Justice Department, but which never seemed to result in any systemic changes. After years of adults complaining about the situation, it was the empowerment of the students themselves that resulted in action that would garner national attention and force some degree of changes in the status quo.

The “safe space” of the Guerrilla Griots Human Rights Media Arts Center and the supportive relationships within Green Guerrillas program that foster a sense of belongingness, self-worth, and empowerment were the incubators for these young people to feel that what they had to say to their peers, school officials, parents, community, and even a national audience, mattered and could be an effective force for change. Broadening their perspectives via the in-depth study within the program of contemporary and historical social movements through a variety of audio-visual texts, particularly movies, helped place their desires for change within a continuum of forces that were not framed as deviant nor “watered-down”, as mainstream media and education have often portrayed them. At the time of the walkout, one teen had been in the program for seven months and the others for at least a year. Having built up skills

in public speaking, media analysis, critical thinking, and media production, as well as feeling a sense of confidence in their abilities through positive expectations and rewards, Green Guerrillas were empowered to be young leaders challenging the status quo in their lives.

Youth Empowerment

It is the stated purpose of S.T.A.M.P. to work with underserved and marginalized communities. Green Guerrillas, as a youth development program, is particularly focused on working with teens who are at-risk for incarceration, criminalization, and low expectations from school and society. Though they may not be particularly concerned with issues like climate change and pollution prior to joining the group, they are often acutely aware of the emotionally and psychologically toxic nature of the environments they are exposed to in society, school, and even their own families. I asked them to share with me what was going on in their life before they joined the program.

James:

I had just gotten suspended from school and was in trouble with the law. They said I could come back the next year, but I was suspended for the remainder of the year and it was only two weeks in.

Becky:

Not much at all actually...stayed home everyday...did nothing. But after joining Green Guerrillas I became more outgoing. I'm willing to go out more and try new things.... Recycle [laughs]. Yeah, there was not much going on so this was a big opener...opened the door for new things for me.

Kim:

(Laughs). Oh god, a whole bunch was going on. Getting in fights with my mom - we weren't getting along. I was messing up in school. I was depressed. That's what they say-I was depressed. Yeah, all that, I was just like losing focus.

Mark:

What was I up to? Absolutely nothing [laughs]... I was looking for a job... I was doing my music, that's the only thing really... trying to get that off the ground... to keep myself out of trouble 'cause my mom was like I was getting in to too much trouble and I needed to find something else instead of wilding out on everybody when they made me mad.

Nehanda:

I was very bad. I used to run the streets. Never came in on time. Nobody couldn't really tell me nothing. Drugs.... Fighting a lot... I think because when I used to do just whatever I want, and I had got locked up in the system and it just messed with my head for a little while and so when I got out I didn't have no respect for my mother, basically because I don't know why she put me in there, I would say, and she knew it, so I just did what I wanted to do. I think the system just messed with my head... when I was in detention and foster care. I don't know, it just happened so quick and I didn't think it would ever happen to me and it did. So when I got out I didn't like nobody.

Each of their situations were unique when they joined the program. What they all shared in common were serious social, emotional, and educational challenges. My question and their responses did not address, in-depth, specifically any of the personal and sensitive challenges they continued to deal with while participating in the program, which, for most of them, were still significant. Rather than focusing on the negative issues in their lives, by creating a supportive “youthtopian” environment for them to experience healthy relationships and a fresh perspective on learning, the program sought to help them navigate their challenging circumstances from a position of strength and well being. Encouragement and empowerment are two primary goals of Green Guerrillas praxis. We never speak of peoples' weaknesses; rather we talk about underdeveloped strengths and how to nurture them.

Finding A Voice

As noted previously, much youth development research focuses on the benefits of active participation and “voice” to youth within an organization, which translates to other aspects of their lives. I asked them to describe a situation where they felt empowered to make their voice heard on a subject that is important to them, what it meant to them, and to explain how their involvement with Green Guerrillas influenced their thoughts on empowerment and having their perspective heard. James speaks about his experience working on our second video.

Making a movie is one way, cause you have to work with everyone else. I think it [*Green Guerrillas v.2*] definitely reflected us as young people - all the music.... You basically let us do what we wanted to do, but it was about something though. I think it got our point across, but it was also fun and loud and exciting for a documentary.

For him being part of a collective effort that was representative of their culture as young people is empowering. During the pre-production planning for the movie, all of the teens had expressed that this movie should be more exciting and “MTV-like” than *Green Guerrillas v.1*. It was important that this new one reflect more of their aesthetic and musical sensibilities. For it to have all these elements and be an educational tool that would reach other people gives him a strong sense of accomplishment.

Kim, who is very confident and articulate, finds empowerment in using her public speaking skills to address a variety of situations that came up during her participation in the program.

The walkout.... all our meetings... somehow I got this leadership role... I just like to talk. The whole walkout thing- when Mr. Wilson came in there talking and everything, all the protests, holding signs and stuff. Also at the conference when I was on the radio talking about equality and social justice. That event at

IC,⁵⁰ the play about prisons, when I spoke out about the 13th amendment - none of the college students knew that.

From the leadership role she assumed during the school walkout, to being on a nationally syndicated radio show at The Dream Reborn conference, to participating in a large college event where she could express knowledge that the college students did not have, having the confidence and ability to make her voice heard about issues she cares about was empowering for her. I asked her to elaborate on why it was important to her.

Because it's coming from my point of view. You don't see too many young.... well first of all, I enjoy it. I do feel empowered when I'm telling people about this and about that and I'm giving my opinion, but I'm also trying to educate people. First of all I'm sixteen and my peers see me talking about this and talking about that, maybe they might be inspired...maybe I'll say something some day and they'll be like, "let me go look that up". And then I have siblings, too. They make fun of me all the time. My sister's stupid, she had a recording one time, you know how you can record on your phone? She tried to pretend like she was me. A couple weeks later I'm going through it listening to it and all you hear is her, "hi, my name is Kim, and let's talk about the political environment, cause Judith Pastel....". She was imitating me; it was hilarious. They always make fun of me, but see I try and go tell them stuff, too, which is a benefit for them. They're learning. They're younger than I am, of course. I like speaking out and I like doing it for a good cause.

Being young and having strong views about social justice and environmental issues, with the ability to influence and educate her peers and siblings is a source of pride for her. She enjoys expressing her opinions, but more importantly, she values the sense of justice that comes from speaking out on what she feels are important issues.

Becky, too, finds empowerment in being able to voice her thoughts. Though she does not feel nearly as comfortable as Kim speaking publicly, she is very active in

⁵⁰ Ithaca College.

online social networks and discussion forums. She relates some of her past experiences confronting what she feels was ignorant behavior taking place online.

I was talking to a bunch of people online and they already think I'm mean. It was this forum and these two Chinese siblings were saying that Black people are scary, even though they don't know any and it's just what they learn from the media. I had to be like "ok dude, it's a stereotype, what are you doing?" and they already thought I was loud and kinda strange. Another time basically a guy started acting homophobic and it was really, really annoying, they're always trying to protect "their balls". It happened multiple times. Those are the times around those issues - race and stuff - that I had to tell them to go fall off a ditch [laughs]. I was very pissed, so all I was feeling was pissed.

It was important cause I felt it was the right thing to do. My dad always tells me if you feel that it's right, just do it, so I did it. I'm just annoyed at close-minded people, like really, really annoyed and I just have to say something. It's not pretty when I'm annoyed. Also it's for their own good, just to let them know that you guys do not look any manlier. It's more manly if you're just comfortable with your own sexuality. You don't have to be like, "hey, I'm not gay". If I didn't know any better, I'd be like, "oh yes you are cause you're hiding something right now". And also the Black people are scary thing. It's a stereotype, you know? Where did you learn this? I asked him straightforwardly, "how are they scary, did they ever do anything to you?" and he was like, "no", so why are they scary? "They look like they're gonna beat me up". They're not gonna beat you up. If they're gonna beat you up, so is that White kid over there. You're Chinese; you're on the same boat. That guy he was also in that "I'm not gay" conversation. He's destroying himself without me saying anything. People like that, I just want them to know what I'm telling them and keep it in mind cause it's not important that I get all my anger out, it's more important that they get what I'm saying and learn from it. If they don't get what I'm saying they're gonna do it again and I'm gonna be pissed off again. What's the point of that? Even though I'm being loud and mean and rude, I'm gonna have to be loud and mean and rude the next time if you don't get it. Make it easier for the both of us.

Now I feel I speak my mind more. Not at public events, but I just do it more. I have more of an opinion almost. No, I always have opinions, but I go "nah I shouldn't say it", but now I'm like, I'm just gonna say it. It makes me feel like it's important to speak out more.

In the environment of Green Guerrillas, many spirited discussions and debates take place around movies that are watched, current affairs, and personal situations. Through these experiences, Becky feels she is more confident in articulating her opinions. Her sense of justice and fairness is strong and she feels compelled to confront people who stereotype or exhibit homophobic behavior. Even though she gets angry at people, she shows her maturity of thought when she states that it is more important for people to understand what she is explaining to them and learn from the situation, than for her to cathartically release her strong emotions.

Developing Character

Mark's role with the organizing activities around equity issues in the ICSD is a primary example of empowerment for him.

[The walkout] taught me that I do have a lot of leadership skills. Cause I had a lot of people following me and listening to me. So I had to try my best to set the right example, which was really hard. Very, very hard. It also taught me that IHS⁵¹ is a piece of crap. Which I knew that before, though. It taught me that when people do things together they get more accomplished cause if it had just been me and James try to do this, nothing would have been done. We probably just would've gotten suspended for making too much noise. But the fact of it being over 60, 70 kids walking out of the school made a big difference. Like ok, they're serious; it's not just play. Then the fact that when we started it, we didn't just do it and leave it at that. We kept going with it and we still going with it to this day, just slowly.

He discovered his own natural leadership skills and personal empowerment while simultaneously learning first-hand about the power of collective action. The walkout placed him in situations where he had to place the collective good of the cause above his own emotions and desires. Consistency, he learned, is an important characteristic

⁵¹ Ithaca High School

of the struggle for social justice for it to be successful. They did not just protest, but also continued to organize and work with others to put the issue forward, forcing the school district to deal with it. Through his experiences in the program Mark also learned about critical reflection, consequences, and agency.

I feel like I've matured somewhat because I think I look at things more before I act. Sometimes... not all the time. Before I act sometimes I'll think to myself – what's gonna be the consequences of me doing this? Is it really worth it? I wasn't doing that. It's Leslie's fault now that I'm doing it, so I thank her for that. Cause I'll usually be the one; I'll act first and think later. Like I'll do something and later I'll be like fuck I shoulda never did that. They helped me think about what I want to do with my life and how I'm gonna get there. Cause the only way for me to get there is if I do it myself.

For some adolescents, decision-making can be very difficult and risky behaviors can have extremely serious social and neurological development consequences⁵². He attributes his growth to his interactions with the adult mentors in the program. The development of maturity is an essential part of Mark's sense of empowerment. Without it, he finds that he is subject to potentially negative influences.

At first I think I was like one of those people, how can I put it, under the influence of the status quo. That's a good way to put it. And now that I've been taught and that I think about it- they're right. If I keep doing the things that I was doing, I'm not saying I'm doing all good now, but I'd probably been locked up already. So I think it helps me to understand me better because it helps me understand what I want to do with my life, not just for me, for my moms and my little brother, they watching me, seeing what I'm doing. If I'm fucking up then what are they gonna do? I'm showin' an influence on them. Cause that's how my big brother was on me. I seen things he did and I was

⁵² For an in-depth examination of adolescent neurological development as it pertains to alcohol abuse from a Western scientific perspective, see Brown, S.A. et al. (2008) *A developmental perspective on alcohol and youths 16 to 20 years of age*. For a community psychology perspective based on African-centered education in a liberation framework, see Potts, R. G. (2003) *Emancipatory education versus school-based prevention in African-American communities*.

following and now I realize just cause he's doing it doesn't mean I need to do it, too.

Having a mature and critical understanding of his own life not only keeps him from being as influenced by negativity, but is also empowering for his family. He can see the influence and effects of the decisions he makes on his mother and younger brother. Mark recognizes the importance of feeling empowered by making good decisions about his life.

Kim credits the program for her having an awakened consciousness and a desire to speak out about injustice. She contrasts where her thinking is now compared to before she joined Green Guerrillas.

I didn't feel empowered before because there was nothing to be empowered about, [laughs], life was beautiful, I guess.... not beautiful it was "normal", so there wasn't a problem. I was learning what I needed to "learn" in school - not really. I didn't see...I was living the status quo life. Everything seemed normal so I didn't really need to speak out. But now that I know it's the status quo - school, they don't teach you everything and that things aren't really normal and the world isn't really ok. I can speak out on what I'm learning now. Because if I didn't know, just think of how many other people aren't going to know or don't know. So I was just one of a lot.

She associates empowerment with increased knowledge and awareness. Getting exposed to new ideas and concepts through the program she feels has allowed her to critically analyze the ways in which social conditions are maintained through ignorance. Empowerment for her includes an obligation to share knowledge with others. She knows that the way she used to think was not unusual and is quite common, not only among her peers, but also within the larger society.

Nehanda also finds empowerment in the sense of satisfaction that came from working on movie production and seeing projects through to their completion.

When I first got the job I just got the job cause, like, I knew who Leslie was. I thought it was just a regular job, but once you get into it and you started doing something and you feel something after you put all that hard work in.... We had the thing on the Commons and Cinemopolis. I was really excited cause people were there to watch what we did. It was a good feeling. It made me realize, I can do something if I stick with this. I should be doing something positive for my life instead of just trying to avoid everything, cause you can't avoid it. So I'm going to Job Corps.

As the very first teen to join the program she had worked on both movies. Having them screened publicly to great acclaim was exciting and rewarding after all the hard work that was put in. It empowered her to see that she can accomplish tasks and do something constructive. Even though she had left high school before graduating, she draws on her sense of accomplishment and empowerment to help her make the decision to go into the Job Corps and get her G.E.D., rather than hanging around Ithaca not being productive with her life and increasing the chance of coming into contact with the criminal justice system, as is the case with many high school dropouts.⁵³

The beneficial attributes of the Positive Youth Development framework are evident from the responses given during the interviews. Having intentional goals for the program, such as completing a movie, that generate positive developmental outcomes like confidence and character building, are essential to the praxis of Green

⁵³ Studies have shown that prison populations throughout the United States are overwhelmingly comprised of people who have not finished high school, in addition to significant numbers of those with learning disabilities and mental health issues that were not adequately addressed by the educational and social welfare institutions they experienced in their youth. See Wald & Losen (2003) *Defining and redirecting a school-to-prison-pipeline*.

Guerrillas. By being able to work, learn, and play in an environment that is supportive, empowering, expecting, rewarding, and enduring, these teens are not only afforded the opportunity to broaden their perspectives on social and environmental issues, but are developing the skills and sense of agency they will need to succeed in their lives, despite the challenges they are facing.

Being a Green Guerrilla

I asked all of them to tell me what being a Green Guerrilla means to them. Their answers showed that, while they shared some common themes, the program held a unique meaning for each of them. James states simply, “young sustainable storytellers that challenge the status quo. Environmentally conscious.... We talk about things that aren’t usually talked about”. He begins his response with one of the descriptions that we had collectively come up with to describe ourselves when we were making our second movie. Consciousness of environmental issues is important to him, as is engaging counter-hegemonic narratives. Making connections between issues that most people do not and making movies are all a part of that in his assessment.

In her response, Becky touches on the diversity of the different aspects of the program and the positive effects it has on her.

First of all it’s a job, but at the same time it’s more than a job. At a normal job you would just go in and do your thing and get paid, but here it’s more like, even if you weren’t getting paid it’s still worth doing what we’re doing. We do community type things so it’s helpful to the community.... it’s helpful to people who watch our DVDs, it’s helpful, at least for me, Green Guerrillas themselves. I wasn’t getting into trouble normally and stuff but it does keep people out of trouble. It’s a place to go and we learn things. Even though now I’m all paranoid and read all the ingredients on the back of things. It changes people in good way, not in a bad way.

She attributes a great value to the work the program does, even if it were not a paying job, by highlighting the positive community outreach and the internal cohesion and support. For her, it is a transformative learning space where young people learn to critically engage the world, as well as get support for making good decisions about their own lives. She notes that she has become acutely aware of what is in the food she eats and connects that to her involvement in the program.

Like Becky, Kim finds the positive interactions with the local community to be a defining aspect of Green Guerrillas and like James, she places environmental consciousness centrally to her conception of the program.

It's being a part of this group. You have different beliefs-you're about sustainability. You do video work. That's a tricky question. People come up to you like, "aren't you with Green Guerrillas?". It's cool being a Green Guerrilla. You actually mean something. I think we're important in the community. Some of the things we do get us attention, you know? But it's for good things, so it feels good to be a Green Guerrilla.

Getting favorable recognition from people who have either seen her in the movies or speaking at an event gives her a strong sense of pride in being part of the group. Instead of getting attention for negative actions, as is too often the case with young people, Green Guerrillas are known for the good work they do, which gives her a feeling of satisfaction and well-being.

For Nehanda, even though the group operates as a collective, she feels it prepares young people to be able to stand on their own through knowledge and education.

I would say an independent individual that is educated on sustainable life.... You can try to help the world out to live a different way.... I just know the truth now about how the world is today.

She also sees an obligation to reach out beyond herself and actively promote sustainability at a global level. Having confidence in her knowledge of the dynamics of modern life through the wide variety of perspectives she has engaged, as well as the development of her own critical thinking faculties has empowered her as a Green Guerrilla.

Mark frames his response in terms of growing up and gaining maturity through his involvement within the program.

First, before I was a Green Guerrilla I was stuck up, a know-it-all; I didn't need no help with nothing.... But then after a while, more responsibility came up and at first I wasn't prepared for that.... They stood there, they helped me and I helped myself. They had more support in me then I had in support of myself, though. They was there and I still took it for granted doing stupid things here and there.... I guess I'm still growing up, still trying to find my way and where I fit in. I think this showed me a lot and I matured a lot.

Feeling supported, trusted, and encouraged helps him to develop responsibility for himself and his actions. It has not been an easy process, but it was one that produces tangible results that he can see in his life, through his continued journey on a path of self-discovery and reflection.

I asked Che for his perspective on what the organization means to him from his experiences as an adult mentor in the program from its inception.

Green Guerrillas is a community, a family. As a volunteer, I have had the opportunity and privilege to watch the youth participants grow and evolve, come and go, and it has been bittersweet. Some of our participants have been very talented in the media aspects of [the program], while others have taken to the educational components. During the first fall session, I overheard one participant use a word we strongly discourage. When asked why she felt it necessary to use that language, she explained how she was using it contextually, and it was clear that she had a solid grasp on a complex interaction of race and gender issues, and that she had learned this mode of thought through working with Green Guerrillas. Moments like that fill me with an indescribable feeling.

He explains that the organization is much more than what it appears to be on the surface. The connections between all the members are so strong he likens it to family and community. He draws a great sense of inspiration from seeing the teens develop, both in their technical and their critical thinking and analysis skills. There are, however, challenges in working with the teens that he elaborates on.

The target demographic [is] kids who are often labeled by the educational or penal systems as troubled, difficult, at-risk. What I see are young adults trying to navigate in an uncertain world, trying to find a place for themselves amongst conflicting messages about their value and worth. It's, of course, not always easy. Working with so-called-at-risk youth can be exhausting. We're talking about kids whom the system has often already deemed failures, or whom the system has simply ignored. These are kids who often have needs that are not being met in any of the arenas of their lives. Our role as volunteers is not just that of font of information and skills, but as an older brother or sister, who will be there for the participants when teachers or parents cannot be. This has led the volunteers to become very much a part of the participants' lives. When they are having trouble, it troubles us; when they succeed, we share in their success.

What makes Green Guerrillas much more than simply a job training program are the close bonds that are forged between young people who are looking for support and guidance in their lives and adults who are willing to help them in a variety of aspects, often extending beyond the regular activities of the program. This holistic approach

is beneficial for all involved. The collective bonds of friendship serve to strengthen and empower the group as a whole.

The importance of the connections with one another, as well as with the larger community, highlights the centrality of supportive relationships to the success of the program. The opportunity to belong to a group that has special meaning to them and is widely recognized in the local community as being something special, where young people are known for the good work that they do, is something they are all proud of. It is seen as helping to make good decisions and staying away from negative activities that are self-defeating, strengthening the supports they have in other aspects of their lives, such as family, school, and community.

The Dream Reborn

Attending The Dream Reborn conference⁵⁴ on the 40th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination was an extremely powerful transformative learning experience for the whole group. Kim found it to be both enjoyable and intriguing.

I liked Dream Reborn. There was so many people there. I talked for hours and hours and hours about Green Guerrillas. I didn't know what to expect, I just knew there were gonna be a lot of people there, it was about Dr. Martin Luther King, and we were gonna march, but I didn't really know what it was about. I guess it was like networking.

⁵⁴ “The Dream Reborn was a chance to embrace and commemorate the legacy of Dr. King and all of the visionaries and fighters who have stood up for racial justice, hope, unity, and equality for all people. It was also a chance to bring together a generation of new leaders who are taking on the chief moral obligation of the 21st century, building a green economy for all. Together, we worked to heal our communities, break down barriers of race and class, and build pathways out of poverty to uplift the entire nation. Together, we will continue this work”. From Green For All's website for the conference at <http://www.dreamreborn.org>.

Even with extensive pre-planning and research, she did not have a frame of reference for what it was actually going to be like. She found that she had to do outreach on a new level that was unlike the relatively small events in Ithaca where Green Guerrillas had spoken or tabled. Being an outgoing person, she readily engaged adults and teenagers at the conference.

I was working the booth. Every time somebody came up, I had to tell them about Green Guerrillas and exactly what we do. That's when I was on the radio. That was nice. And I just liked meeting different people who are also doing the same thing - participating in trying to be green or something. They're a part of the movement, basically. Cause in Ithaca there's really not too.... this is like the one of the few things that kids would be participating in. So to be with more kids doing stuff for the movement, it felt like, I don't know...it was better to connect with them and to actually see that there's other teenagers doing things...cause you don't see that here really, so that was different.

In her experience, Green Guerrillas are usually the only youth of color working on environmental issues in their local area. It was empowering for her, as well as the other teens, to meet peers who looked like them, from different communities from all over the country, who were also working on topics such as sustainability, social and environmental justice, and green jobs. Being part of a historical moment and looking impressive as a group were also important aspects of the experience for Kim.

And Tupac's mom was there - that was nice. [We had] the coolest looking sweatshirts. Everybody wanted that sweatshirt. I had to be like, "no we do not have them for sale" [laughs]. Oh, and seeing Al Sharpton in person, and Dr. Martin Luther King's children, that was real nice. It was an experience. It was sort of...I wasn't really emotional...I guess I was, but sort of sad and sort of angry at the same time. The thing was, though, even though Dr. Martin Luther King is gone, that's not going to stop the rest of the people from doing what we have to do. It felt great, kind of, being there. But it was sort of intense and kind of sad at the same time. It inspired you to move on and do what you have to do. That was really nice though, the doves. I didn't appreciate the police being there.

Being at the National Civil Rights Museum for the ceremony that commemorated the exact moment when Dr. King was shot was a powerful experience for Kim. She found a mix of emotions in herself that she could draw on for inspiration in her life. Making the connection across generations and continuing King's legacy was one of the primary goals of the conference. She remembers the moment clearly, including doves of peace that were released by people gathered with Dr. King's children on the balcony where he was killed, as well as the heavy police presence. Since she associates law enforcement with racism, brutality, and injustice, she was not comfortable with seeing them on top of the museum and nearby buildings.

Becky speaks about her experiences working at the conference, which she found both exciting and challenging.

When we went to Memphis that was memorable, of course. That was fun. We were part of the video team. I had to film a thing basically all by myself. It was exciting. I wasn't sure how the older folks were gonna react and feel about this, cause we're just a bunch of teens. We still make a lot of mistakes with the camera and things. So I just wanted to do a decent job so they don't say horrible things about us. I was kinda nervous, but at the same time I was like "yay, we're doing this". It was fun...we were running around doing so much things at once, we couldn't get lunch properly, so the speakers didn't really stick, except for the guy I had to film. I remember some stuff from that. It was good to have that conference. It was new, I had never done anything like that and been part of a group that could actually put something together and have it look like a lot of effort went in to it. So I was happy of course and nervous, but I have been being a part of Green Guerrillas for over a year so at the same time I'm kind of used to it.

She sees that the program has prepared her for dealing with new situations, as well as giving her significant media skills. She went in to the conference feeling a little apprehensive about their role as part of the professional video crew taping the whole

event, but she handled herself well and was able to take a great deal of satisfaction from it. It was also empowering to her to be part of a group effort that had a booth that stood out and clothing with Green Guerrillas logo that caught peoples' eyes. Having full color t-shirts and sweatshirts emblazoned with our graphics helps to create the sense of belongingness that is so important to a successful youth program. Overall it was a very enjoyable experience for her, as she mentions "fun" twice, which is significant, as she is someone who is not easily impressed generally.

Our participation in this conference was a transformative experience for all of us. It was deeply significant situating ourselves as participants in the legacy of social and economic justice that Dr. King envisioned. Being part of such a large gathering of grassroots people and community organizations, primarily of color, who are looking toward a sustainable future, where discrimination, oppression, poverty, and prisons are replaced with green jobs, agriculture, economics, as well as justice, was empowering. We all took a great sense of pride and accomplishment in our work. The warm reception and recognition we received from so many diverse people was encouraging and empowering. The relationships that we gained through our participation will continue to grow as we build alliances and collaborations with other communities and organizations in a mutual quest for a just and sustainable future. Through our participation in The Dream Reborn, a seed of transformative learning has been firmly planted in fertile ground.

The experiential and social learning aspects permeated the course of our involvement, from the creation of a new tri-fold presentation board to have at the booth, to our participation in the video team documenting the event, to engaging the other conference attendees in workshops and at the booth. Being a part of a

significant historically and culturally situated moment and space tied to a struggle for human rights and environmental justice held special meanings for each of us, as we were being embraced and encouraged energetically by everyone we encountered. Being connected to past generations through the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and having the opportunity to interact and share our stories with young and old alike was a re-affirmation of the importance of inter-generational social learning. Whether it was former Green Party Vice-Presidential candidate Winona LaDuke (White Earth Anishnabe) speaking on Indigenous philosophies of caretaking the Earth for future generations and the importance of renewable energy and sustainable agriculture development for Native communities, or former Black Panther Afeni Shakur speaking about the legacy of her late son, Tupac Shakur, the largest selling rapper of all time, and the organic farm she created on her family's land, or the teen Green Guerrillas speaking with and interviewing an older Black man from the local area who runs an organic, non-synthetic chemical lawn care business and wanted to teach them how to give an "elevator pitch", connections across cultures and generations were being made that would have a lasting impact on our consciousness. It broadened all of our perspectives and strengthened our relationships with each other and other community-minded people and organizations. The Dream Reborn was a moment when we could see the confluence of all the aspects of positive youth development and social learning for critical consciousness that we had worked hard at facilitating. Our stories of sustainability had resonated with a diverse audience and we were thankful for all of the positive feedback we received that helped inspire and motivate us to continue our work.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

We are in this perceptual and technologic reality that they can take the flesh and blood that's called uranium and put it through a mining process and convert its being in to a form of energy that's used to run a system. Well, they do that to us - take the being part of human and through mining our minds, through the indoctrination and programming of how to perceive reality, they use our intelligence to mine our being and turn it into a form of energy to run their system....And we know when you take the other life forms - being is a life form - so whether it's a stone, when you put them through this mining process it leaves behind poison and toxic waste and we're aware of that.

Well, when you mine the being part of human it leaves behind poison and toxic waste: the fears, the doubts and the insecurities that become a part of our perceptual reality. If we understand that we are human beings and we access our power through clear and coherent use of our intelligence then we can create and manifest the reality that we need...If it's anything this predator energy fears, it's a clear and coherent thinking human being.

John Trudell (Santee)

What We Learned Together

The entire project of Green Guerrillas Youth Media Tech Collective is a collective collaboration to create a safe, fun, and supportive atmosphere for learning critically about environmental, social, economic, and political issues while advancing positive personal development and empowerment through the sharing of stories. The participatory research that is the substance of this thesis opened an avenue for all of us to engage in self-reflection about the program and our relationships within it. Though we have received many accolades for our movies and our outreach work, we are not content to rest on our laurels. We welcomed the opportunity to take an in-depth analysis of where we have been and what that means to us, thereby helping us so that we can improve the program and make it more effective. A community organization exists as an organic process and element. Adapting to new information and changing

circumstances allows one to remain relevant, avoiding stagnancy, and therefore thriving and evolving. Discovering and sharing our thoughts on what we have done so far through the stories we could tell about our experiences with the group showed us the power of a holistic positive youth development paradigm.

It is our hope that the lessons and inspiration that can be drawn from this research will be beneficial to other youth-focused organizations, educators, and development practitioners, as well community activists and organizers. Though it is a historical snapshot of “medicine stories” - narratives of our experiences as individuals and as a collective through which we found healing and empowerment - that emerged from the beginning of Green Guerrillas, we feel that it speaks to universal issues of learning and the development of sustainability-oriented consciousness and practices, particularly as it pertains to working with adolescents who are at-risk for low expectations and educational/career outcomes.

I used participant observation, field journal notes, everyday informal conversations, and in-depth semi-structured interviews to inform this research. The narratives told in the interviews generated much of the substance for this thesis. Young peoples’ voices are too often marginalized or ignored in society, and the richness of their responses impressed upon me the importance of having that voice be extremely present in this thesis. The ongoing and extremely close working relationship between myself and the other Green Guerrillas allowed me to explore in depth the themes and ideas that came up during the course of this research as being central to the perspectives and operation of the group.

On casual examination, Green Guerrillas is an interesting job-training program, where teenagers learn multi-media production and computer skills. As we have seen through this thesis, there is much more going on than producing movies about sustainability and participating in community events. The development of critical social and environmental consciousness is taking place within a social learning context that is seen by the participants as being more engaging than formal education. It is informed by Indigenous philosophy in which the study of dynamic relationships within a framework of spiritual ecology results in personal and communal growth. While the tool of education through media production is important, just as much so is the learning environment of social relationships. Through their collective activities in the program, participants re-story and give new meanings to their realities through the stories they tell as active agentic participants in addressing important issues facing themselves and the world at-large. They are no longer passive recipients of education and their circumstances, but have become motivated critical thinkers who are developing new perspectives on how to engage learning in ways that make sense to them. The critical and experiential nature of the learning environment situates them as conscious participants in their own knowledge acquisition rather than passive vessels who must absorb and regurgitate what they are taught.

Even though most of the teens in the program do not consider themselves to be "outdoorsy" or nature-oriented types, they are highly cognizant of environmental issues and place a great value on them. One of the common themes regarding their conceptualization of sustainability was that Green Guerrillas do not make a separation between the social and the environmental. Ideals such as equality and justice in society, where people are treated fairly and have access to the resources they need to maximize their potential in life as communities and individuals hold as much

importance as conservation of species and ecosystems, organic agriculture, and other things that are commonly perceived as being “green” or having to do with mainstream discourses around sustainability. This reflects a holistic orientation in the group’s pedagogy that incorporates diverse knowledge systems, perspectives, and experiences while exploring the relationships between them. The participants, by being able focus on issues that are of direct interest and relevance to them, such as discrimination in school and transportation needs, are able to come to their own understandings of how their lives relate to a complex confluence of historical factors and contemporary economic, political, environmental, and cultural forces. By situating the meaning of sustainability within their own context and redefining it on their own terms, it becomes a concept of deep personal meaning and attachment, rather than an abstract idea that belongs to others and has no relevance to their lives. All of them expressed a desire to have homes and vehicles powered by renewable energy. They could see the importance of making conscious decisions about their own resource consumption. Healthy eating and positive relationships are important to them. However, they did not limit themselves to only the personal. Several of them expressed the need for collective action at a larger level with changes in policy and society being needed. The program itself has served as a model example for them of the beneficial aspects of working collectively both internally, and externally, in the collaborative work we have done with other organizations. The Dream Reborn Conference, and their participation in it, was a highlight of this aspect.

Several of Green Guerrillas showed that their understanding of sustainability was strongly influenced by Indigenous worldviews and philosophy. This was not surprising, given their regular contact with Indigenous people, however the extent to which it was influential was interesting given their lack of a tangible conscious

connection to the natural world. Though I always had the sense that we could be doing more activities outdoors where some stronger connections might be made, it seems that the experiences they did have in the program with community gardening, berry picking, doing an interview at an apiary, and camping out, were also positive influences on their environmental outlook. A sense of generational responsibility for environmental caretaking in anticipation of those yet to come, was reflected in all the interviews. They felt their generation was going to be fixing and cleaning up a lot of problems left unhandled or mishandled by previous ones.

Being exposed to counter-narratives from their own cultures and others, which challenge mainstream hegemonic narratives, was also identified as being important for the development of their critical consciousness. As the program is engaged in the art of storytelling through the medium of digital video, there is a baseline awareness of the centrality of stories for shaping understanding of the world. Whether the subject was the Black Panthers, global climate change, or Columbus, the participants appreciated being in a learning environment where these subjects could be examined in depth and diverse perspectives could be sought out. The use of media studies was an essential element of the program that everyone responded to and acknowledged. By studying the content and the aesthetics of audiovisual media, both learning about the subject matter and learning about media production was accomplished. The overall diversity and hands-on, experiential nature of the activities engaged in provided avenues for discovery of new ideas and new insights for all of the participants into how they think and learn.

Having the skills, tools and ability to reach out to other people and other communities with stories of sustainability that are fun and engaging for all ages

has been incredibly empowering for the whole group. The outreach activities have been some of the most popular with the participants. Being able to take a prominent and active role in a new “green” movement, where social and environmental issues are tied together and youth from diverse backgrounds have a significant voice, has given them a sense of being a valued part of something larger than themselves and even the group. Dealing with serious issues does not have to be boring, depressing, or “uncool”. Having confidence in themselves to articulate their perspectives and share what they have been learning about to their peers, other young people, and adults, through accessible forms of media, has made them value their accomplishments within the program.

Working well internally as a collective has been essential for developing the relationships and trust that allow us to engage one another fully and nurture that confidence. We help each other learn through sharing, providing examples, and through direct instruction, which all contribute to give us a common framework of understanding. This becomes the foundation for generating knowledge and taking action for social change. Action can be walking out of school and protesting the school board or it can be educating others through Green Guerrillas blockumentaries. Through the work done through the storytelling medium of digital video, the teens were able to see that they have important stories to tell and that people will listen and respond to them. Having a sense of being active agents for change, guided by a conscience of ethics and justice, has given them an incredible sense of empowerment that they did not have in their lives prior to joining the group. As they recognize the importance of positive change in the larger world around them, they see the importance of themselves and their own lives. The particular becomes connected to the universal.

Though it is acknowledged that this kind of qualitative social science research is very context specific, certain implications and understandings can be drawn about critical place-based learning around environmental and social issues in a holistic multi-cultural “youthtopian” environment that could inform other youth projects, whether they have a media, environmental, or civic participation focus. The importance of belongingness, sharing, and being valued are identified in this research. The opportunity to engage a diverse group of people, be they peers or adults, through both outreach and media-making activities, has been key for the participants engaging in reciprocal social learning and creating a sense of community and place in a socially-alienating environment.

The diverse elements of Indigenous knowledge, storytelling, social learning, experiential learning, a holistic critical pedagogy, and a “youthtopian” Positive Youth Development approach work together synergistically to afford a group of adolescents the opportunity to become activist filmmakers and engage subjects affecting their lives that they likely would not have on their own. The variety of experiences provides avenues for engagement for the different learning styles and inclinations of the group.

The larger theoretical implication is that the empowerment of the most marginalized elements of society, in this case, so-called “at-risk” teenagers, by adding a diversity of perspectives to the conversations around sustainability, will bring about new solutions to the environmental and social problems facing the world today. The development of an egalitarian community of learners can counter the alienating effects of the oppressive machine culture of Western civilization through liberatory critical education for self-empowerment and self-determination that draws from the

particularities of a given cultural context, as well as the richness of bio-cultural diversity. The teens of Green Guerrillas Youth Media Tech Collective have successfully put themselves “on the map” as vibrant advocates for this new pathway and paradigm for youth in Ithaca and beyond to create beneficial changes for society and the environment.

At the time this thesis was completed, our third feature-length “blockumentary”, *Green Guerrillas v.2.5: Green Grease Guzzlers*, had recently been finished. A sneak preview was screened to a receptive audience at the second annual Northeast Climate Confluence. Additionally, a compilation of the short videos that had been made for our Youtube channel during the 2008-2009 school year was assembled with different figures in the hip hop community giving “shout-outs” or “drops” between the segments. A selection of the shorts were submitted to film festivals and screened at Scribe’s Street Movies in Philadelphia. Our internet presence has grown to include two websites, a Youtube channel, a regularly updated Wordpress blog, and an Earthkeepers membership on Changents.com.

All of the teens who had been in the program up until the time the interviews took place, including the five who were interviewed, have either graduated high school or earned their G.E.D. The teens, their families, teachers, and other community members have expressed to us how much they value their participation in the program. Several will be attending college full or part time during the 2009-2010 academic year. Two are incarcerated. One is in state prison and the other is in a county jail awaiting sentencing. The program has continued to bring in new teens as spaces become open. During the summer of 2009 we began a process of incorporating more activities focused on ecological literacy and nature awareness. Utilizing recently

acquired High Definition (HD) cameras and equipment, we have started to hone our skills for the upcoming production of our fourth feature by doing nature cinematography and interviewing a local Indigenous forester about forest ecology. The experienced teens help the new ones to see what is expected of them by setting an example, as well as through their day-to-day social learning interactions in a friendly and supportive environment.

Limitations of this Study

For as much as the interviews that comprise the “data” for this research are strongly present in this thesis, I feel that in some ways they just scratched the surface of what the teens know and what their experiences with the program have been. There was a spectrum of comfort with the interview process. Some gave brief responses and had to be prompted to give more in-depth answers. Others were comfortable speaking at length. At the time of the interviews, Nehanda was leaving Ithaca for the Job Corps and was very distracted during her interview. Since she was the very first Green Guerrilla and possesses a great knowledge of the early experiences of the program, it was unfortunate to not be able to get more of her perspectives for this project. Additionally, I found that, as thorough as I thought my questions were, there were still aspects of the teens’ experience in the program that did not get touched on. As a participatory narrative researcher working on a project with an organization that I am intimately involved with, I came to understand that I would be in a learning process about my own assumptions and biases. I had to accept that there would be uncertainties even as I strove to apply rigorous methodologies. However, the journey was quite valuable, preparing a foundation for subsequent research that could delve even deeper into the stories of Green Guerrillas, both individually and collectively.

Future Research Directions

A great potential exists for extended research that documents and assesses the long-term implications in the lives and consciousness of the participants in Green Guerrillas as they become adults. Additionally, with the sharing of this model of multimedia storytelling-based multicultural youth education for environmental and social critical consciousness with other diverse communities, it will be interesting to see how different contexts influence the expression of the pedagogical framework and how the people in those programs utilize aspects of experiential multi-media and outdoor ecological learning. Comparing and contrasting these programs through in-depth case studies, and perhaps less intensive methodologies, could reveal many insights into different cultural and technological influences on the process of human learning. This would be a benefit to the continued development of formal, informal, and non-formal educational programs that serve the needs of the diversity of learners of all ages, rather than the needs of the market economy.

As Green Guerrillas program matures and develops, incorporating new pedagogies and learning tools, other avenues of inquiry will be opened up. Community mapping of human ecological relations in the Ithaca area has already begun as a new method for the group to examine how they utilize their local environment and how they perceive and ascribe meaning to these interactions with different spaces and institutions. By incorporating mapping of environmental hazards, the potential exists for working with other people and community groups on the generation of a greater awareness of threats to both humans and the ecosystem. Additionally, as more outdoor ecological learning activities take place in the program, they are likely to generate a deeper and more familiar connection to nature and environmental issues that will enhance and inform the media production aspects. As

there will continue to be hands-on activities related to organic agriculture, green building, renewable energy, and alternative transportation, it will be interesting to see how the different pedagogical elements interact. A more thorough examination of the use of Indigenous knowledge, philosophy, and pedagogy in the program is also warranted, since that is a primary influence on its ideology and practices. The findings from that research could be of benefit to community activists, environmental educators, and youth development mentors.

One methodology that I think would be effective and plan to introduce into the future research would be to use pictures from the ubiquitous photo documentation of program activities as starting points of discussion for the interviews. Seeing pictures from different activities is likely to draw out even richer and more detailed responses. By seeing what stories the photos themselves tell, interviewees will be encouraged to narrate the seen and unseen aspects. It may seem obvious that this will likely be especially effective in cases where the recollection of an event is not very good, however I think it will be beneficial in most instances for enhancing the interview process by stimulating memories and thereby evoking more in-depth narratives.

One aspect that needs further exploration in future research is developing meaningful ways of encouraging greater participation of the youth in the research planning process. There is a great deal of literature on the subject that can be examined. A large research project is not something of interest at all times to teenagers, especially when it is competing with more “fun” activities like filmmaking, media studies, and community events. Finding the balance between streamlined and efficient research, and democratic, full, and authentic participation will have to continue to be negotiated.

This project has provided an example of participatory action research that serves the interests of both the community organization, S.T.A.M.P./Green Guerrillas Youth Media Tech Collective, and a larger community of inquirers who are interested in the intersection and interaction of multiple approaches to youth development and learning, particularly as they apply to themes such as cultural diversity, justice, sustainability, and environmental education. With Green Guerrillas setting an example as “poster children for the new green movement” there exists a great potential for inter-generational shared learning in the interest of environmental and social justice and community empowerment, not only through the continued public outreach activities of the organization, whether in-person or through multi-media texts, but also through the process of sustained self-analysis and research.

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